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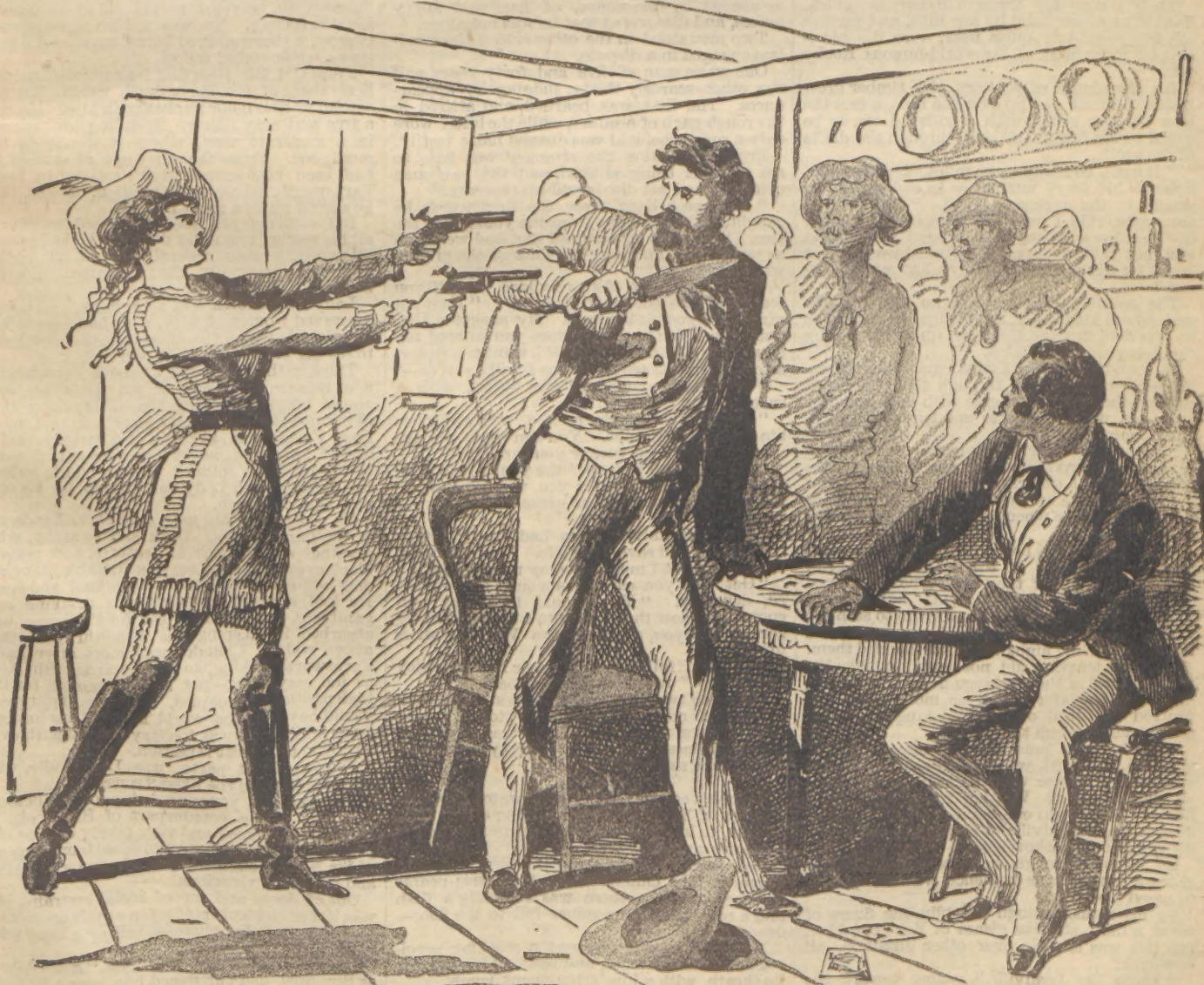
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DEADWOOD DICK IN LEADVILLE; or, A Strange Stroke for Liberty.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER,

AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS, "ROSEBUD BOB" NOVELS, "DEATH-FACE, DETECTIVE,"
"WATCH-EYE," "CANADA CHET," ETC., ETC.



"CALAMITY JANE HELD A PAIR OF COCKED REVOLVERS, WHICH SHE HAD LEVELED TOWARD RALPH GARDNER THREATENINGLY."

DEADWOOD DICK IN LEADVILLE;

OR,

A Strange Stroke for Liberty.

A Wild, Exciting Story of the Leadville Region—of Regulators and Adjusters; of Road-Agents and Bandits—of the latest events in the strange career of Deadwood Dick, the Prince of the Road.

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CHAPTER I.

A MIDNIGHT CRIME—THE TOURISTS.

THE night was a stormy one in the latter part of March. The snow fell ceaselessly until the mountains and prairies were covered, and the gulches drifted full, when a fierce wind came driving down from the north, with relentless fury, scattering the powdery flakes in a blinding cloud. Yet a stranger was abroad—a man mounted upon a jetty steed, and muffled in a heavy fur overcoat, that with the great collar coming up about his neck, completely screened his face.

He wore a broad-brim slouch hat, and cavalry boots, mounted with spurs, with which he would occasionally touch his animal.

Through the blinding fury of the storm the man and beast toiled, seeming determined upon reaching some given point that night, despite the adverse elements.

Their course lay through a narrow gulch, flanked on either hand by low hills, and further off, but seemingly quite near, were the snow-capped mountains of the world-famous Rocky belt.

An abundance of scraggy pine timber grew beside the trail, and up over the hills, a fact the lone traveler noted with a satisfied air, as he urged on his faithful animal, through the drifts in the gulch.

"It can't be many more miles," he muttered, beneath his furry muffler, as he endeavored to penetrate the darkness ahead. "Ugh! this is the worst ride I ever experienced. Triumph, my good horse, it has been a hard jaunt upon you, but take courage. The meal we so covet is not far distant, unless I have lost my reckoning."

The animal, however, gave no sign that he understood his master, but trudged on as well as he was able through the snow, impeded, too, by the flying clouds of flakes.

No sound broke the stillness, except the mournful howl of the wind through the pines that resisted the fury of the gale with iron stolidity.

On—on went the horse and lone rider, without stopping.

Presently the gulch grew narrower and deeper, and as he rode down through the gap, the stranger gave a surprised start. For he beheld a sight which he had not expected, inasmuch as the night was one when prowlers were not likely to be abroad.

What he saw was half a dozen mounted horse-men, on each side of the trail—dusky, grim and motionless as if they were ornaments fixed there by Nature's mighty hand. Not a word they spoke, nor a motion they made to stop the lone traveler; they seemed to form a part of the dark howling night which surrounded them.

The lone traveler did not pause to make the acquaintance of these strange horsemen, on seeing that they offered him no molestation, but spurred on, until out of rifle-range; then he gazed back through the gulch.

"Them chaps must be road-agents, I'll allow," he muttered, wiping the snow from his eyebrows, "or else what be they doing there, on such a night? Waiting for a stage, most likely. But, ten to one the stage from Webster doesn't reach Leadville to-night, without a double gang of snow-shovelers."

On he rode through the gloomy gulch, finally rising a considerable eminence, where he paused to gaze about.

To his right, through the blinding flurry of snow, a faint, starlike gleam of light twinkled, but this was all. In every other direction, all was dark.

"There lies Leadville," gazing toward the light. "But there is naught there to attract me. But one thing could ever have brought me to this region—"

He did not finish his soliloquy, but abruptly

turned his horse in an opposite direction from the light.

Rough cabins and barn-like shanties soon loomed up in his way, being the coverings of the mouths of shafts, of "leads" and "strikes," which have made Leadville the "red-hottest" place in the Far West, and more than a rival of Deadwood in her palmiest days.

Threading his way among the shanties, the stranger at last dismounted under an open shed, where he left his horse, and once more set out, but this time on foot.

Wading through the snow to one of the larger cabins, he opened the door, and entered, without the usual formality of knocking.

The cabin was floorless, and a large hole penetrated the earth near the center, over which a large windlass had been constructed, to lower a huge iron bucket into the mine, of which it was the shaft.

A single lantern suspended upon a nail driven into the wall, furnished the only light within the building.

Closing the door behind him, the stranger sat down by a little wood-stove, in one corner, and warmed, while his eyes roved about, curiously.

"This must be what they call the Wild-cat mine," he said, musingly, "for yonder is the rude picture of one of those animals. Just like Morris, that; he always was an odd one. I hope he'll come soon. I am not anxious to stay in this rookery all night, without supper or bed."

But the party in question did not put in an immediate appearance, and the stranger lit his pipe for a smoke. The lulling effect of the tobacco smoke, together with the fatigue of his rough ride, must have quieted his mind, for he was soon asleep, and snoring as soundly as ever did venerable old Morpheus.

How long he slept, he knew not, but he was awakened by the sound of loud and angry voices, and discovered that he was not alone.

Two men stood on the other side of the windlass engaged in a dispute.

One was a man of five and forty years, and the other scarcely thirty, judging by appearances. The first was bearded, and attired in the rough garb of a miner, while the latter wore only a mustache, and was dressed more tastily.

From his position the stranger was able to see without being noticed, and the two men evidently had not discovered his presence.

"You are a liar!" were the first words he caught, and they came from the younger of the two. "You are an accursed liar, and were you as young as I, I'd mop the dust off the ground with you."

"You can have that privilege, now, if you feel able," the elder replied, coolly. "I am not afraid of you, in the least. My assertion that you have stolen from me, since you entered my employ, is the truth, and all I want is a restoration of my property. That I will have, or—"

"Or what?" demanded the other, with a sneer.

"Your life!" the elder replied. "I will tolerate theft from no one. You can repay me the sum you stole from me, or you can fight!"

"Fight it shall be then!" the young man said, savagely. "My hate for you will allow me to kill you, with the best of grace. Choose your weapons."

"They are knives. You had better return the money, and save your life. I do not want to kill you, but I must have my money back."

"Get it, if you can!" the young man retorted, defiantly. "You should know me well enough to know that I am not a fool. I am eager to kill you, and then the Wild-cat all is mine!"

"Should I fall, you will never live to enjoy the victory!" the elder gritted, hoarsely.

Then, the two men drew knives from their belts, and advanced stealthily toward each other. Upon the faces of both was an expression of deepest hatred—in their eyes flamed a light which set to words meant

Death!

From his corner the stranger watched coolly. Enough of life in the rough mining district had he seen, to know that it was best to interfere in no man's quarrel.

Nearer and nearer crept the two foes, with knives firmly clutched, and teeth set; nearer and nearer—then there was suddenly a flash and a report, and the miner fell to the floor—dead!

The younger man dropped a smoking revolver from his left hand, and restored his knife to its sheath, with a low, triumphant laugh.

Spring!

What a sense of exquisite pleasure that single word excites. How many hearts beat afresh as

the springtime dawns, with its refreshing breath, its sunny days, its delightful showers, and its clear skies.

Spring had come in the mountains and upon the prairies, bringing with it flowers, grass and foliage, and the songs of a thousand silver-throated birds. All nature seemed ready to woo and be wooed by every lover of the beautiful.

A stage was toiling along the tortuous but picturesque road from Webster to Leadville. It was not the regular passenger coach, but a private, open conveyance, containing a party, evidently tourists, judging from their personal appearance, and the several huge trunks appended to the rear end of their wagon.

This wagon was drawn by six prancing horses, while in the driver's seat sat a veteran Jehu, who handled the ribbons with perfect skill.

A "regular beauty" of a driver, Jack Fargett was esteemed, for he had been the hero of more scrapes with flood, fire and road-agents than any other man in the Rockies, and had run the gantlet with his stage where other men less brave, would not have dared to venture. And then, Jack Fargett knew all the prominent road-agents, personally, and knew whom he could fool with and whom he couldn't.

The party, aside from Fargett, consisted of five persons—or, to use Fargett's characterization—"one gentleman, one conceited fule, two leddies, an' a nigger." The latter, much to Fargett's disgust, had to ride with him on the box.

These ladies and gentlemen we shall know as the Farnsworths, a party or English tourists, in search of picturesque sights and scenes in America, although each traveled for a different object.

Sir Noel, the handsome elder son of my Lady Farnsworth, traveled to get rid of the bore of London society. He was a blonde, eight-and-twenty, a thoroughbred ladies' man, and a generous, whole-souled fellow.

From old Sir Roderick he had inherited the lion's share of the Farnsworth wealth, but the wealth or title made no change in him. He was a free and easy fellow. Spending his revenue in a moderate way, where it would do the most good. From the early age of sixteen he had been kept constantly in society by Lady Farnsworth, whose sole ambition, it was, that he should make a great match.

But, although Sir Noel acquiesced to nearly all his mother and sister dictated, he had grown to regard women, generally, as an intolerable nuisance—especially the scheming butterfly belles of fashionable circles.

Lady Farnsworth was a brunette, and a well preserved woman of fifty, who had passed her best days in the service of society, and now lived to see her children eligibly married.

Third in the party was Chandos Farnsworth, who traveled expressly to see the sights, and amuse himself by criticising everything that didn't meet his favor. He was the second son of Lady Farnsworth, aged six and twenty, and a sort of hanger-on, as, having been cut off without a cent in his father's will, he had to look to Sir Noel, through Lady Farnsworth, for his support and loose cash.

He was neither the most amiable or handsome of the Farnsworths. Dark and swarthy, with a rather sinister cast of features, and restless black eyes and hair, he was irritable, haughty and self-conceited, often to actual rudeness. He had a great propensity for drinking and gambling, and much of Sir Noel's money was absorbed in keeping his spendthrift brother above water. Chandos was more after Lady Farnsworth's liking, as she regarded Sir Noel as too easy going—not austere enough for the high position he occupied. Chandos, she argued, would have let the world know of his importance, while Noel was too lazy and sluggish ever to create any great sensation.

Fourth of the party, was Lady Belle, who traveled because she liked "roughing it."

She was the youngest, being only nineteen, and was just a counterpart of Sir Noel. A blonde, well-shaped and very pretty of face, she possessed the same mild, unruffled temperament of Sir Noel, though she was a trifle more girlish and wild, and vivacious.

Out of doors and out of social restraint she was in her element, ready for anything from a horse-race to a fox-chase—a sail or a hunt with hounds.

The negro, Josephus Wash, or "Snowflake," as Sir Noel had christened him, was a servitor whose business it was to superintend luggage, black boots, dust the clothing and make himself generally useful. He was an eccentric fellow, chock full of fun and music, and was never so

much at ease as when telling some abominable yarn in his genuine darky dialect.

The Farnsworth party were bound for Leadville, intending to make that their stopping-place while they were "doing" the surrounding places of interest.

Jack Fargett kept his six-in-hand at a lively trot, and cracked his whip incessantly, while his keen eye roved ahead and around him.

"Yes," he said, in answer to a remark from Sir Noel—"yas, et aire a purty day, but then, ef ye'd bin over this yere trail as many times as I hev, ther scenery wouldn't affect ye muchly. I opine instead o' studyin' out ther picturesque-ness uv every heap o' rocks, ye'd better be feelin' in yer pocketbooks fer loose cash."

"For loose cash?" Sir Noel echoed. "How do you mean?"

"Oh! ye'll parseeve, directly, no doubt. S'pose ye've all read in ther hymn-books, hain't ye, and sorter studied over yer kittenkizems, occasionally?"

"Very likely we have; at least there are recollections of my early days when stern Sir Roderick had me imprisoned for hours in the nursery, because I couldn't tell who was the oldest man," Sir Noel replied, laughing.

"Waal, mebbe ye've read, then, of a thoroughbred cuss called Deadwood Dick?"

"Deadwood Dick?"

"Thet's w'at I sed, pilgrim."

"Why, I think I've heard of the fellow. Some notorious road-agent, eh?"

"Waal, ye've purty near hit it, stranger. Deadwood Dick's one on them same chaps. And as he's at present takin' toll on this yere route, I opine 'twould be healthy fer ye ter began to count up yer dudads, bein' as Dick's a fust-class sort o' hoss and don't keer o' deprivin' a galoot of his life, as long as he can git what toll he wants. An' while I'm remarkin', stranger, ye'd better keep sum o' yer cash in reserve, fer Dick ain't ther only galoot as is tappin' this yere trail, by a long shot. Captain Hawk the bandit generally speaks in fer his share. Thar, now, begin ter shell out yer sand, fer as I'm a live hoss-driver, yonder comes Deadwood Dick and his crowd around ther bend. Whoa-a-a, thar! It's no use o' rummin' no gauntlet ag'in' that cuss, narry a time!"

CHAPTER II.

DEADWOOD DICK'S DEBUT—THOROUGHbred TOM—A "BRUSH"—GONE!

It was as Jack Fargett had said.

A party of ten or a dozen horsemen were coming around a bend in the gulch stage-road, at a moderate trot, and at their head rode he whom they called Deadwood Dick, the road-agent—the same graceful equestrian—the same black-clad knight of the trail, of whom we have written so many times before.

At the head of his band of masked followers he rode, as fearlessly as he had in the days of Deadwood's excitement, and when the Black Hills was the Mecca of the fortune-seeker, as Leadville is to-day.

"Yas, thet's Deadwood Dick," Jack Fargett said, reining in his six horses with a powerful effort of his muscular hands and arms—"thet's him, an' no mistake, an' I ain't agoin' ter git my last sickness by tryin' ter run him down. So shell out yer V's and yer X's right liberal, ef ye keer ter git ter Leadville, to-night, my beauties."

"Why this is a blarsted houtrage!" Chandos grunted, angrily. "Do you expect we are made of money, sir mule-driver? Go ahead!"

"Waal, I should remark not," Jack Fargett replied, stolidly. "Ef ther old court re'lizes her exact condition, I opine we shall stay hyar. Mule-driver, eh?" and Jack's bushy face began to assume a ferocious look. "D'ye kno', Mr. Englisher, thet I've swallered several bigger men 'an you, fer a less insult! Thank ye, I don't pull reins over nothin' but a hoss, an' a clear beast, at thet!"

"Hi! yi, dat's do trufe!" assented Snowflake, rolling his eyes. "Me an' Jack Fargett be drivin' dis yere coach, so you keep still, Marsa Chandos."

"Curse the nigger, I will chastise him for his impudence!" Chandos cried, hotly, reaching over and jerking the long-lashed whip from Fargett's hands. "Now, you black rascal, I'll—"

"Hold yer hosses, thar, ef ye please!" suddenly roared the stentorian voice of Fargett, and he shoved a huge revolver almost down in under the irate Englishman's nose. "Ef ye know when ye're liable ter be blowed up by a teetotal 'arthquake, cheese it, ter oncet. Thes nig's all level, an' w'en ye go ter tech him aboard my ship Pinyfore, ye're clean off yer groove!"

Chandos reluctantly returned the whip, with a scowl, while Lady Farnsworth shrugged her shoulders, and Sir Noel and Lady Belle laughed outright.

It always pleased them to have Chandos fairly beaten.

By this time the coach was surrounded by the road-agents, with Deadwood Dick at the front. He rode forward, politely tipping his hat to the ladies.

"You did well, Fargett, to stop," he said, with a nod to Jehu, "for you cannot run by me like Captain Hawk. Ladies and gentlemen, your money and jewelry, if you please."

"By what right do you make this demand?" Sir Noel found spirit to ask. "I was not aware that we had highwaymen at this day and age."

"Then you were not well posted," Deadwood Dick replied, coolly, but courteously. "These mountain districts are infested with ruffianly bands of road-agents and outlaws, who prey not only upon one another, but upon all who come within their reach, often resorting to the most fiendish torture to extort money. It does me proud to claim that Deadwood Dick and his followers are in no way allied to such gangs. We are a band of free rovers, under a flag of our own. They call us road-agents, because we haunt every mountain trail, by night and by day. Let the world regard us as it will—we care not. We are a band, to a man, who hate the world and everything worldly. While we are called road-agents and robbers, we style ourselves the Rovers of the Rockies."

"But, you are robbers, all the same?" Sir Noel interrogated.

"By no means, sir!" Deadwood Dick replied. "In a literal sense, we are guardians of the trail, and bankers. For instance, we pounce down upon you, relieve you of your valuables, and give you in exchange, a peculiar token, which you carry exposed upon your person. You go to Leadville, and walk about the streets, and, first you know, a packet is slipped into your hands, which prove to be your valuables safely returned, minus a few dollars, which we keep to repay us for our trouble."

"But, what is the object of this?"

"Our object is twofold—firstly, to protect the traveling public from being robbed by Captain Hawk and his bandits; secondly, to earn an honest livelihood by our new banking system, and at the same time fight against these ruffians, in behalf of the State."

"Do you do this of your own accord, or aided and abetted by the people?"

"Of my own accord, and a desire to do good for the evil past of my name. The people—well!" and a bitter laugh came from the Prince of the Road—"they would snite me down, were I to do them each and every one a blessing. They have a grudge against me which only my death can appease. And as for them, generally, I bear them no ill will."

"You're a strange fellow," Sir Noel said. "I do not know what to make of you."

"Ye can stack yer trick on him every time, you bet!" Jack Fargett said. "I'll go his security frum one dollar ter a milyun, every day in a week."

"I do not ask you to trust me!" Deadwood Dick said. "I make my demands for your valuables the same as any road-agent, and I believe you are wise enough to see that resistance is useless. A few miles up the road you will meet Captain Hawk, and his gang. Once they get hold of your jewels and money, you may whistle before you get them again."

"You demand our valuables then, with a promise of speedy return?"

"No! I promise nothing. You have heard me speak of our custom."

"And if we refuse to yield them up?"

"Then, Jack Fargett and his stage goes on to Leadville without you. Come! my time will not permit me to stand and parley with you all day!"

"I'll not give the thief a sou!" growled Chandos, angrily. "Shoot him, somebody!"

"You had better keep still or he may shoot you," Lady Belle whispered.

"As resistance seems useless, we may as well part with our jewels and cash, and trust to the honesty of this outlaw banker. If he returns us what we give him, my faith in road-agents will be somewhat strengthened," and Sir Noel took out his huge wallet, and laid it into Deadwood Dick's hands, while there followed it his handsome watch and chain, diamond rings and studs.

Pretty Lady Belle then handed over a watch and purse, and a few plain ornaments, and Lady Farnsworth and Chandos sullenly did likewise. It was gall and wormwood to their proud

natures to be forced to acquiesce to the demands of "a common robber," as Chandos growled.

When he had received all, Deadwood Dick gave an amused glance toward Snowflake, who, with his eyes widely distended was extending an old Peter Funk watch, and a bag of old coppers.

"No, you can keep your property, Pompey," the Prince of the Road said, with a laugh. "I don't believe Captain Hawk would even notice you, of a dark night."

Then turning to Sir Noel, he continued:

"One thing more, my dear sir, which you forget to leave in my care."

"What?" Sir Noel demanded, in surprise.

"The Farnsworth casket of jewels, which you have very rashly brought with you into this country, since they are worth many thousands of dollars!" Deadwood Dick replied, coolly.

"Good heavens, man, how did you find out so much?" the young baronet demanded, suspiciously. "I shall believe you leagued with the devil, presently."

Deadwood Dick smiled under his mask.

"You compliment me," he said, with a strange laugh. "That credit has been given me before. As to my knowledge of your jewels, I saw the elder Lady Farnsworth displaying them to some ladies at a hotel in Trinidad, a week ago. It occurred to me then, when I learned that your party were bound for Leadville, that I'd better intercept you and secure your things from the clutches of Captain Hawk."

"If it is not asking too much, who is this Captain Hawk, of whom you speak?"

"Like all others of his evil nature he is a heartless ruffian," Deadwood Dick replied. "He is also a bandit, who stops at no crime to further his success. His crimes would fill a large volume. Everything passing over the trails to Leadville that is not too strong for him, he halts and plunders, often killing the victims. Since Deadwood Dick's Rovers patrol the mountain trails, however, his spoils are lessened, and likewise his good opinions of me."

"You demand the jewel casket, then?"

"For y-ur own sake, I do."

Without a word Sir Noel unlocked a valise at his feet, and took therefrom a small barrel-shaped casket, hooped with bands of pure gold, and handed it to Deadwood Dick, who received it with a bow.

"That will do," he said, courteously. "You may now go on your journey. But—hold! I have not yet given you the check. Here it is—a gold coin, valued at twenty dollars, bearing the 'D. D. R.'—i. e., Deadwood Dick's Rovers. If you have that in sight, while in Leadville, your valuables will be returned to you. If you lose it, I can not be responsible for them. I bid you a pleasant good-day!"

And tossing the coin to Sir Noel, he wheeled his horse and galloped up the gulch in the direction whence he had come, followed by his men.

Jack Fargett then cracked his whip, and the coach rolled on.

"Oh! wasn't that a delightful adventure!" Lady Belle exclaimed, laughingly. "I really enjoyed it; and that Deadwood Dick—wasn't he perfectly handsome?"

"Why, Belle, my dear, how can you!" Lady Farnsworth exclaimed, putting up her hands in horror. "I am shocked at you."

"Pshaw! you're always shocked at a straw, mamma, dear. I do think that road-agent was a real love of a man, and so does Noel, while you and Chandos sat as prim and stiff as if you were monarchs upon your thrones, instead of two of a party traveling for fun and excitement."

"Dear! dear! what fun could you see in that horrid man, and his villainously masked followers? Chandos, I should have thought you at least would have resisted!"

"How could I when they had me covered with their revolvers?" was the reply. "Each one of the accursed highwaymen had a pistol leveled at my heart!"

"Pshaw! you're a coward, Chandos!" Lady Belle exclaimed, with a merry laugh. "I am not afraid. Just think; Deadwood Dick did not hurt me, and he had his eyes leveled at my heart!"

"And at mine, too, fo' suah!" put in Snowflake. "My heart was jes' in one perpetual flitter-flutter, and I feel like a school-gal of fifteen."

The day, though beautiful, was not nearly so beautiful as before, in the eyes of the travelers, for the reason that they were momentarily expecting an attack from the road-agent, Captain Hawk.

Nor were they disappointed.

From a mountain dugway the vehicle rolled

down into the depths of California gulch, into which the shadows of night were dimly gathering.

Without regard to the roughness of the road, Fargett let his horses out into a swift trot, and his long lashed whip cracked incessantly.

Suddenly four men sprung from the side of the trail, and by their united efforts succeeded in throwing Jack Fargett's horses back upon their haunches.

"Just hold on a bit," one of them exclaimed, stepping to one side. "We ain't road-agents, Jack Fargett, an' you can't gantlet past us."

"Well, what d'ye want?" Fargett demanded, lowering his right hand toward his belt.

"You'll find out, presently, if you wait long enough. We want to ride with you, a bit of a ways, if you don't object."

"Can't ride. This ain't the reg'lar stage, but a private snap," with a nod toward his tourist passengers.

"I don't care a cent if it's a private or a public snap," the spokesman of the party retorted. "We're the chaps as is goin' to ride, and don't let it slip your mind. Never heard of me, perhaps—Thoroughbred Tom, at your service. My men, here, and myself, are after a party of road-agents, headed by Captain Hawk. The captain has a plot afoot to stop your stage, and raise the devil, generally, and we have a desire to be around when the circus comes off. So we want to hide down in the bottom of your barouche, and when they pounce down on you, we'll lend a hand in the funeral!"

"All right!" Sir Noel cried. "Climb in, and with our united force, we'll make it interesting for the gentlemen of the road."

Thoroughbred Tom spoke to his men, and they all climbed into the wagon, and crouching down, they were covered over with blankets.

Then, on rolled the stage, until there came a stern order, rolling out of the darkness, in a coarse voice—a single word:

"Halt!"

"Now! then," Thoroughbred Tom said, in a low tone—"draw and cock your weapons, and make every shot count. You, Fargett, let the horses blaze ahead!"

And Jack Fargett did let them blaze, for at a yell from his lips, and an extra sharp crack of the whip, they leaped away at a "dead" run.

Then, Thoroughbred Tom and his companions, together with Sir Noel and Chandos Farnsworth, sat waiting for the issue.

It came, an instant later, in the shape of a volley of rifle or revolver shots, that did no particular harm, and a chorus of yells from the bandits.

Then, in response, those in the flying vehicle returned a volley from their revolvers in the direction whence had come the flash of the enemies' weapons—not alone one volley, but several in rapid succession.

Each shot, seemingly was answered by a fierce vindictive yell either of baffled rage, or pain.

An attempt was made to stop the stage by men who had blockaded the road, but it was ineffectual, for Fargett's nearly frantic horses trampled them under foot, and their agonized shrieks only added to the dire confusion of the hour.

At last the stage whirled suddenly around a sharp bend, and the last of the bandits disappeared, as Thoroughbred Tom gave vent to a wild, ringing shout of victory, which was answered by Captain Hawk's men from the distance—a yell of baffled rage.

"Oh! maybe we didn't salivate 'em right liberal, though!" and the young vigilante laughed heartily. "Ten dollars to one some of 'em 'll go home with a headache, never more to tantalize this trail."

"My God! where is Lady Belle?" suddenly gasped Sir Noel. "Stop, Fargett—stop for Heaven's sake. Lady Belle, my sister, is not in the carriage. She must have fallen out!"

Neither was Lady Belle in the carriage; her seat was empty!

Lady Farnsworth was crouching beside Chandos, in the bottom of the wagon, who had collapsed into a dead faint, at a bullet scratch upon the arm.

"Belle! Belle!" shouted Sir Noel, when Fargett had reined in his horses, at the top of his voice. "Belle! where are you?"

But, there came no response, except a wild exultant screech from Captain Hawk's men, around the bend.

"That settler it!" Thoroughbred Tom said, when he heard the yell. "They've captured your sister, and you may well drive on to Leadville, which is but a short distance away,

for the king and all the king's men could not take her again to night!"

"What!" Sir Noel cried, nearly distracted, "must I leave my sister in the clutches of that pack of demons? God forbid!"

"Nevertheless, you will have to do so for the present," Thoroughbred Tom said, "until you can muster a sufficient troop to make an attack upon the bandit chief. His gang of outlaws numbers many men, and it would be simply an act of folly to propose to give chase with our present force. I'd advise you to take your lady here, and find her accommodations in Leadville, while you instigate a search for your sister."

"And you will help me?" Sir Noel interrogated, anxiously.

"I cannot in person, but can furnish you a substitute. Fargett, drive on. Leadville!"

CHAPTER III.

OLD FACES—A STRANGE WAGER.

LEADVILLE!

That new Mecca of the wandering miner, the speculator, the gambler and adventurer. The place where many minds gather, to form a seething, restless populace—a teeming city near the timber line.

What Deadwood was to the Black Hills, but so short time ago, Leadville is to the mountain district in which it is situated. A "red-hot" town it is, with plenty of business men with capital, and generally an industrious class of citizens, though, as every town of its class, there is a preponderance of ruffianly and villainous characters, who are constantly in a jangle among themselves, and who literally "boss" the town.

Leadville differs in one respect from her sister city of the mining regions, Deadwood. She is within the governing eye of a State, while Dakota is but a territory; and her laws are enforced by the iron hands of those who set themselves up as guardians of the peace.

Justice is stern; and then, there is a class, who in defiance of the law, set themselves up as adjusters of their own wrongs, and the measure they mete out to victims is generally a cord and the limb of a convenient tree.

Almost to a spirit of insubordination has this thing amounted to among those who plead for justice without receiving it, and hence came the organization known as the Regulators and Adjusters, making Leadville the possessor of two laws—a law of the State, and a law of the people.

Looking down upon Leadville, one is not struck by anything prepossessing in its appearance. Situated on the left bank of California gulch, upon a gentle elevation, it has the appearance of the average mining city that has been built with more rapidity than elegance.

The principal thoroughfare, Chestnut street, is constantly crowded with people who have come to the new Mecca in search of wealth—people from every quarter of the globe, one would say, upon looking them all over. All are hurrying along in their respective directions, and everything has a lively, bustling appearance.

Let us pass along Chestnut street and make observations.

It is early evening.

The sun has gone down over the distant snow-capped peaks of the great Rockies, and the early gloaming is settling over the town so far up near the timber line.

The shanty stores, saloons and dance-houses on either side of the street are well lighted, while out in the street, disdaining the use of the sidewalks, the crowds meander to and fro. The cries of an auctioneer of cheap jewelry; the stentorian shouts of a corpulent individual who is endeavoring to attract a "house" for a cheap variety theater; the yells and curses of drivers, together with the incessant hum of more moderate voices, serve to make a strange din that at first impresses the new-comer unpleasantly. Americans, Frenchmen, Jews, Swedes, Germans, Mexicans, Spaniards, Irishmen, Chinamen, and the everlasting negro, are among the different types we observe moving by in the great, restless swarm; speculators, gentlemen of leisure, rough, bewiskered, dirty miners, in woolen shirts and stogy boots, gamblers, sports, professional pickpockets and thieves; men of all stages and stations in life, may be singled out, if one is an adept in the business.

Women are frequently seen hurrying along, but as they, as a rule, mind their own affairs, they seldom are molested, unless it be by some drunken tough, who is speedily lugged off by the genial but thoroughly effective sheriff, Jo Murphy.

Passing along the street, we noticed innumerable great saloons and gambling houses, which

put to shame in point of size and taste of architecture the lesser buildings used for more legitimate purposes.

Entering one of these gambling dens, which bears the name of "Leadville Casino," we find ourselves in a large, partitionless building, well lighted by lamp chandeliers, and a carpet with matting. It is furnished with chairs and tables, a bar, faro and keno lay-outs, and nearly every kind of furniture for gambling.

The walls are hung with handsome sporting pictures, and everywhere is evidence of wealth and good taste.

A score of men are engaged in various games at the tables, and some are gathered about a wheel of fortune, which hums at one end of the place.

There are miners, here, and gamblers by profession; speculators and ruffians, and a mixture of the different types that make up the populace of Leadville.

At one table two men seem to be deeply interested in a game of eucher. And it is a game for stakes, for piles of money, dust, and paper are piled on the right hand of either player, which indicates that the game had either been a long one, with no particular gain on either side, or that it is just started. The latter is the more probable.

One of the players evidently is an American, while the other is a Spaniard, as might be guessed by his swarthy complexion, and black eyes, as well as his peculiar costume.

The American's name is Ralph Gardner. He is a stalwart fellow of one or two and thirty years, with a well-developed form, and a face that many would pronounce handsome, had it not been for the sinister expression, ever hovering about his mouth, and the cold gray eyes. He is inclined to a sandy complexion, his hair being of a brown color, and curling tight to his head, while a heavy sandy mustache shades his mouth.

He is attired in white linen jacket and trousers, with a spotless shirt-front, which supports a blazing diamond pin, and a soft white felt hat, of enormous brim, covers his head.

A massive linked gold chain encircles his neck, reaching down to a watch-pocket in the waist-band of his trousers, and his trowser bottoms are partly tucked into the tops of a pair of fine boots.

Altogether he is the ideal make-up of the character he represented—a reckless, rowdy mining-owner, named Gardner, who has naught to do but to kill time and spend a fat income, which rolls in upon him, day by day.

The Spaniard is a different sort of a character, altogether. He is short and fleshless, with a pinched, dusky face, set off by a compressed mouth, eyes of midnight blackness, a swarthy complexion, and hair and imperial of the same hue.

His Spanish costume is picturesque and rich in its ornamentation, and his hat and cavalry boots are all of the best material.

He now wears no weapons, while his opponent in the game carries a derringer upon his hip, in a pistol pocket.

The Spaniard plays a square deal and a fair game, but a close observer would notice that Gardner is no slouch with the pasteboards, as he continues to win steadily, while the Spaniard's pile is on the decrease, rapidly.

"Have you enough?" Gardner asked, with a sneering smile, as at last, in the course of ten minutes, he rakes in the Spaniard's last doubloon. "It isn't your night for playing, I should say. You will never win, at this rate."

"I will play again," Carlos Cordova replies, stoically. "I will fight you with cards, Mr. Gardner—it shall be *guerra al cuchillo*—war to the knife between us."

So saying, the Spaniard brought a pouch of doubloons from under his *serape* and emptied them upon the table.

"There are sixty doubloons, or nine hundred and thirty-two dollars and forty cents!" he said, in perfect English. "I will wager them against a like number of dollars and cents, if you dare, señor."

"You will only lose!" Gardner answered; "but I will play if you wish. Stack your chips, and I will deal."

Carlos Cordova obeyed, and the game began. A number of spectators gathered around to await and watch the result of the game, for it was known that Ralph Gardner was a card-sharp, and would be likely to fleece the Spaniard out of every real he possessed.

Among the spectators were two strangers in the place—an old man, of uncouth appearance, and a young woman.

The latter was Calamity Jane.

As to her identity our *Half-Dime* audience needs no explanation, as the *Girl Sport* is well-known to them; while to those within the "Leadville Casino," she seemed to be equally recognizable. For nowhere along the Rocky Mountain mines can you go where the name of Calamity Jane has not been heard.

She was attired in a costume consisting of fancifully ornamented buckskin breeches, and a hunting-frock reaching nearly to the tops of a pair of patent-leather knee boots. A jaunty slouch hat boasting of a wild eagle's feather she wore back upon her head; a belt upon her waist contained a pair of handsome revolvers.

These were the principal items of her make-up, except that she was even more handsome than when we saw her last, with her eyes grown brighter, her cheeks more tinted, and her form just a trifle more robust.

In the light of her womanly beauty she looked, as she stood upon the floor beneath the light of a chandelier, and watched the game between Ralph Gardner and Cordova.

She knew the gambler Cordova to be a straight and honest player; for several times she had met him up in the Animas mines, near Silver-ton.

Of Ralph Gardner she was not so sure. He was just the sort of a man she most disliked, with his cynical, overbearing ways, and the sinister glitter in his eyes.

The old man who stood near by was an uncouth old veteran, whose appearance indicated that he had followed many a trail. His hair and stubby beard were grizzled with age, his form was bent and he carried a hard, gnarled stick as a staff to walk with. One peculiarity was noticeable in him, aside from the fact that he was attired in buckskin—his ears had, some day, in an eventful past, been shorn off close to his head. This old man, as well as Calamity Jane, seemed to be recognized, for several spoke his name.

It was Old Avalanche, the Great Annihilator. He and none other.

The battle-scarred veteran had at last found himself down at Leadville, in company with Calamity, to see this new Mecca of the mines.

"Great antediluvian ham-bone that busted the Chinese bill! ef these don't seem like real Deadwood days, over ag'in!" the Annihilator grunted, as he gazed around. "Ef Deadwood Dick war only around these parts to kick up a condemned breeze—a teetotall Norweejan hurricane o' demolition, we shed be all right."

"Eh! Jinny, gal!—hain't them yer concise an' comprehensive ijees o' ther matter? Old Moses who cavorted through ther bullrushes! but thet Dick war a cuss, an' no discount ter ther trade. Ef I warn't gettin' so blamed old, an' my bones an' jints warn't so contorted by ther rheumatics, I'd jest like ter grapple thet Dickey by ther clutch, and shake him blue. Hello! great mortuary o' which Joner war a shinin' light—w'at's this? A game o' eucher. Lordy! ye jest orter see my old mare Prudence Cordelier, pilgrims, w'at's now dead, but once constoited one o' ther jints an' cog-wheels o' ther Great Boreal Avalanche Extirpation Consurn. She war a knowin' anymile, war thet same Prudence, an' don't ye fergit it. Why, it's an actooal fact thet she could tell every card in a pack, and comprehended a game as much an' more so than the generality o' pilgrims. Fer illustration o' ther wonderful sagacity o' thet jint o' ther great annihilation, ye shed hev see'd ther hand she tuk one night in a quiet game. I war playin' w' a heethun Chinese, oncet, an' my Prudence war browsin' cluss by, w' one eye upon thet pig-tail—Lordy! what an orful grudge she had ag'in' ther race! Wal, she sot her eye onter thet pig-tail, an' we played several games, I losin' every time."

Suddenly she gave a screech, and she danced up ter thet John Chinaman, an' grabbed him and held him upside down by her teeth. An' pilgrim, may I never be eternally plagued w' a mother-in-law, ef she didn't shake a hull trick o' cards out o' thet pig-tail's sleeves. Waal, now I shed remark. Great pentenshal ham-bone, tho', but them war no sarcumstances ter ther many other exploits my jints used ter do."

A loud laugh was elicited by the old Annihilator's story, and he was at once a prime favorite.

But, although all dared gaze at her, none had the courage to speak to the eccentric Calamity Jane, for it was reported that she had salivated many a pilgrim for a less offense than looking at or speaking to her.

Ralph Gardner's sinister gaze rested upon her occasionally, but even he was not desirous of looking at her.

At last the game was over, and the last card played.

Cordova had lost! Every lire in his possession had he consigned to the keeping of Ralph Gardner.

He leaned back in his chair, pale and faint, his black eyes glowing like coals of fire.

"Satan seize you!" he gritted, all in a tremor. "You are in league with the devil, Senor Ralph Gardner!"

"Be that as it may, I've cleaned you out!" the dandy mine-owner replied, with a cool laugh. "When you want to see me again, Senor Cordova, you will find me at home. Having played enough for to-night, I'll bid you a pleasant good-evening!"

"Hold on—you must play more!" the Spaniard cried, excitedly. "You shall not carry away my money—you must let me win back enough to get my lodging and a start!"

"Pshaw! Here, I'll give you ten dollars, rather than sleep through another game!" Gardner said, thrusting his hand into his pocket with a yawn, and drawing out a handful of gold pieces.

No! no!" Cordova said, hastily, "I not take your money. I am a gentleman—I receive no favors from an opponent!"

"Well, what are you chinning about then?" Gardner demanded. "How can you play?"

"I'll tell you!" Cordova explained, a crafty smile lighting up his swarthy features. "I will wager my head against a hundred dollars, on the result of one more little game. If you win, you cut my head off in the presence of these people. If I win, I take my hundred dollars!"

A low murmur of wonder ran through the room. Here was a novelty not often occurring in the latter days of mining life.

A man had risked his head on a game! The word passed from lip to lip, and a crowd instantly collected.

Gardner resumed his seat at the table, a strange smile upon his face.

"I will play, if it is your wish!" he said, grimly, "but if I win, I shall claim your head!"

"You shall have it if you win it!" Carlos Cordova replied. "Let some disinterested party cut and deal the cards!"

A stranger was selected from the crowd for this work.

"Great ham-bone thet accompanied old Joner to the Antipodes!" Old Avalanche cried, "thet Spaniard's a cuss, pilgrims, an' don't ye fergit it. Bat, Holy Moses o' bullrush fame! heads must be cheap down in this section. Thar war a time when heads fetched a big sum, w' a road-agent's carkusses attacked to 'em. But, them days aire over, since Deadwood Dick's gone. Great ham-bone! thar war my nannyoat, Florence Night-in-a-gale—she did hev a head, while ye're talkin', stranger—a regular old sledgehammer uv a head, an' don't you fergit it. See'd her take after a tramp, up in Dakota, oncet, an' she struck him whar the pantaloons fitted ther tightest. Lordy! ther two met w' a shock like a consarned earthquake, an' thet tramp jest actooal exploded. An' ther next day ther papers spoke about a lot o' loose flesh bein' found on ther perary, supposed ter hev fallen durin' ashower! Ham-bone thet agitated ther larynx uv old Joner! but that warn't a sarcumstance ter some o' ther exploits uv ther Great Annihilation!"

The cards were shuffled, and dealt.

Then the game began.

Every spectator stood watching in breathless suspense.

The Spaniard played an honest game, but the fates seemed against him, for he lost!

Ralph Gardner rose from his seat, and drew a long, sharp-edged knife from his bootleg, with a chuckle.

"I have won, Sir Spaniard!" he said, triumph in his tones, "and I now claim my dues—your wager, which was your head. Lay it down here, and I will cut it off!"

CHAPTER IV.

CALAMITY SHOWS HER HAND—GARDNER'S THREAT.

"I'll bet you five dollars to a continental red cent that ye won't do nothing of the kind!"

Clearly rung these words through the room, and everybody stared wonderingly, for they had come from the *Girl Sport*, Calamity Jane, and in her hands she held a pair of already cocked revolvers, which she had leveled toward Ralph Gardner, threateningly.

He shrunk back with a curse, for he had no doubt but that Jane meant business.

"Is this your affair?" he demanded, savagely. "You'd better not meddle in business of mine, or I'll cut your head off, too!"

"Ha! ha! you are welcome to that privilege if you regard it as a health-giving task!" Jane replied, with utmost coolness. "As to that Spaniard's head, it is his own. You cheated him at the game, and I saw you!"

"You lie! you lie like—" Gardner began, but he suddenly paused, for the muzzle of Calamity's revolvers raised; she was about to fire.

"I do not lie!" she said, menacingly. "That is a thing, I am proud to say, I never do. I saw you slipping cards out of your sleeve, or else I should never have interfered. Come, now! pony up and refund Cordova every cent you have won from him, or I'll salivate you just so sure's I'm Calamity Jane."

"You to thunder!" Gardner growled, savagely. "I'll not give back a cent. I won it fairly, and I'm goin' to keep my winnings, you bet!"

"And I'll bet you ain't!" Calamity said firmly. "Avalanche, are you with me!"

"Great pestiverous ham-bone thet discom-bobborated ther composure of old Joner, yes!" I'm w' ye cl'ar ter ther teeth, C'larity, gal!" the Great Annihilator replied, hobbling forward. "Ef it warn't fer these blasted rheumatics, I ked lick ther crowd, old's I am. Them war palmy days, howsumdover, when ther jints o' ther Great Committee on Extirpation war all together, in workin' order—thet war me, and my old mare, Prudence Cordelier, and my he-goat, Florence Night-in-a-gale. Oh! but I tell ye we tore thers, them times, as we cavorted like a hurricane o' demolition thru ther boreal lattitudes and longytoads!"

"Come!" Calamity said, turning upon Gardner, impatiently. "I'll give you just two minutes by yonder clock to drop Cordova's wealth on the table. If you don't come to time, there'll be a funeral in Leadville, to-morrow!"

"You dare not shoot me. I have the law on my side!"

"Hang the law! I have the Adjusters and Regulators on mine. You probably know ther terms, to those who cheat at cards. Come! one minute has gone!"

Ralph Gardner uttered a frightful curse, as he pulled a buckskin pouch from inside his hunting-shirt, and emptied the contents upon the table. Never before, in all his experience, had he thus knuckled under to a woman, and that woman scarcely more than a girl.

"Never mind!" he said, in a rage, as he shook his fist, first at Cordova, and then at Calamity—"never mind, curse you. I'll get even with you both, ere long, in a way you won't relish. Remember!"

And with a scowl he strode to the bar for a drink of liquor, after which he took his departure from the "Casino."

Calamity Jane uttered a low laugh as he disappeared, and turned to the Spaniard, who was engaged in gathering up the money from the table.

"You'd best make yourself scarce around these parts, Carlos Cordova. It won't be particularly healthy for you, should your opponent catch you sleeping."

"Thanks, lady; I shall hasten to obey your suggestion," the Spaniard replied. "Let me thank you for so kindly interfering. And should I ever have the opportunity I shall surely try to repay you."

"That's all right. You look to yourself and you'll have enough to do!" Calamity replied, with a reckless laugh.

Then turning to Old Avalanche, she said in a low tone:

"Come! it is no use for us to remain here. I am going to my hotel. If anything occurs that I am needed, you will find me at the Tontine."

"Kerect C'larity—kerect!" the Annihilator replied. "Go an' get rest, gal, fer we ken't tell w'at minnit we're goin' ter be called on ter quell some disturbance. Great ham-bone! I feel better already, since I've got down here whar thar's plenty goin' on. My bones hain't half so rheumatic as they war, an' ef we ked only get inter one scrimmage w' fust class red-skins or ruffians, I opine ther great Annihilation would be once more in workin' trim, I do, by ther eternal shadder of old Bullrush Moses!"

Ralph Gardner left the "Casino" in a terrible passion, and strode down Chestnut street, apparently noticing none of the many persons he passed, to whom he was accustomed to speak at other times. His soul was burning with a fiery thirst for revenge upon the *Girl Sport* for her triumph over him. He knew her not, except by hearsay, but it was his belief that in her he had an enemy.

"Curse her!" he growled, as he strode along. "What does she mean? I never harmed her, and yet she comes to pick a fuss with me. Cal-

amity Jane! Yes, I've heard her spoken of before as a hard crowd to tackle!"

Pausing in front of the Tontine House; where a stage had just driven up, the young mine-owner watched those who were embarking, with idle curiosity. This curiosity soon deepened to interest, however, and then to eagerness, and he bent forward, that he might have a nearer view of the new-comers. His face had grown a shade paler than usual, and his eyes seemed to emit a venomous sparkle of recognition.

The party were the Farnsworths, under the pilotage of Thoroughbred Tom, who assisted them to alight from Fargett's stage, and showed them the entrance to the Tontine.

He then sauntered into the hotel office, for a quiet smoke.

A handsome, dashing fellow was this Thoroughbred Tom, with a close-knitted form of great muscular strength, and a face well chiseled, and looking almost boyish for its want of hirsute adornment. His hair, dark as the raven's wing, was worn down upon his shoulders after the fashion of many of the frontier scouts. His eyes were dusky, and brilliant, while the expression upon his face was pleasant and genial.

Clad in a stylishly fitting suit of light gray woolen material, with a white wool slouch-hat upon his head, and cavalry boots upon his feet, he was the ideal make-up of the sporting characters so often met in those far away western mining towns.

Ralph Gardner followed him into the office of the Tontine, and touched him on the shoulder.

"Beg pardon!" he said, as Thoroughbred Tom turned around, "but I wished to ask the names of the party whom you just assisted to alight from the carriage?"

"Why?" Tom demanded, coolly.

"Oh! because I had an idea that their faces were familiar, though I had the impression that—that—"

Here the mine-owner stopped.

Words that would have escaped his lips he choked off.

"It is probable that you are mistaken, sir," Thoroughbred Tom said, haughtily, and so saying he sauntered away.

A black look came upon Ralph Gardner's face, as he glared after the sport—a look decidedly expressive of hatred.

"So you refuse to answer me, eh?" he mused.

"Well, I must seek satisfaction elsewhere."

And he turned away.

Leaving the Tontine, he made his way toward Stray Horse gulch and Fryer Hill, where the largest mines in the Leadville district are located.

The streets of the town left behind, he followed a narrow path down into the gulch, and thence on to the elevation called Fryer Hill.

Passing among the groups of shanties and cabins which cover the shafts of the different mines, he at last came to an unpretentious, rough board cottage, surrounded by a rail fence, inside of which was a newly made garden, and a few beds of flowering plants.

Passing through the little wicket gate, he approached the cottage by a well-beaten path, and entered the place without the ceremony of knocking.

He passed into a small, uncarpeted room where two women were sitting.

This room was rudely furnished, but everything was clean, and the walls contained a few pictures and ornaments, which gave it a cheerful appearance. A stove in one corner gave forth a trifle of warmth, and a lamp upon a mantle furnished light.

The two occupants were a middle-aged woman and a maiden of some seventeen or eighteen summers.

The elder lady was seated in an invalid's chair, propped up with pillows. There was a pale and wearied look upon her features, which in their youth had been of wondrous beauty, and a pained expression about her eyes and mouth, which evidenced a past or present trouble and worry. She was attired in a plain calico wrapper, and wore no ornaments, whatever.

The maiden was wondrously pretty, with her slight but shapely form, her pure, fair face, set off by a sweetly expressive mouth, lustrous brown eyes, and a luxuriant mass of hair of the same hue, which fell over her shoulders and to her waist.

She too was plainly attired, but looked charming and winsome, with a bunch of syringa blossoms in her hair and at her throat, which was as pure as alabaster.

She rose from her chair, the smile that had been upon her lips changing to an expression of

contempt, as Ralph Gardner entered, while the pained look upon her mother's features increased.

"You, Mr. Gardner!" the maiden said, in a cold tone. "I believe we told you that your calls here were unwelcome."

Ralph Gardner flushed, but managed to smile, in a sardonic way.

"I am aware of the fact, Miss Heath!" he responded, "but I seldom consult the wishes of others, when I have views of my own to further. I came expressly on purpose to talk with your mother—not with you!"

It was Jessie's turn to flush, but it was a flush of indignation.

"My mother is not well, and I pray you won't disturb her," she said.

"Then I cannot comply with your prayers, my dear Miss Heath, for I have business of utmost importance with Mrs. Heath, and must talk!" Gardner returned, triumph in his tones. "You will find that it is better to have me for a friend than an enemy, for as a friend I am rich and influential, while, as an enemy, I have the power to turn you out of your present abode, onto the world."

"Sir?"

"Some months ago I purchased this cabin and ground whereon it stands, for the sum of one hundred dollars, from your father. Crowded as I am by business affairs, I had forgotten it, until your refusal of my suit sharpened my memory, and set me about looking up the deeds."

"This is false!" Mrs. Heath cried, bursting into tears. "I am sure Morris would not sell the home without telling me. Oh! you are very hard on us, Mr. Gardner."

"Not so, my dear Mrs. Heath," the mine-owner replied; "I never am intentionally hard only to those who are hard on me. To such, I extend no mercy. I offered my heart and hand to your daughter, and she scornfully refused me. The blow staggered me, for a time; then the devil came to my relief, and suggested that I turn you out of doors, as I have the power to do. But, even this I would not do, if Miss Jessie would reconsider her verdict, and give a decision in my favor."

"Never, Ralph Gardner!" Jessie replied, spiritedly. "I never held you in too high regard, and I hold you in less, now, that I behold what kind of a man you are. You are not the person I could ever love, or respect!"

"And why, pray? What have I done that lowers me in your estimation? What is the difference between me and other men? I am one of the richest men in Leadville—"

"Bah! why boast of that to us, sir? A part of your riches you deliberately stole from us, for positive we are that it was papa who had a controlling interest in the Wild-cat mine, instead of you. But, his untimely death gave him no chance to advise us of his business affairs, and you took advantage of the fact, destroyed what papers he may have had, and claimed the mine as your individual property! Oh! Ralph Gardner, even though the world may believe in you, and lionize you, I can read you like a book. I hate—defy—despise you!"

"Jessie! Jessie!" Mrs. Heath remonstrated, chidingly, "you should not say hate to anybody. The good Book tells us to Love our Enemies."

"Pshaw! that is nothing to do with my dislike for Ralph Gardner. Do you suppose that one can love a snake that has bitten you? No! indeed!"

Gardner sat and listened, an evil smile upon his face.

"Fire away, Miss Jessie!" he said, with a chuckle. "The more spirited you become, the more I am forced to admire you. You have made some serious charges, but I can afford to pass them by. When you come to find out my innocence, you will regret your hasty words. As to the matter of the cabin, if you will give me your promise to become my wife, I will give you the deed of the place."

"And, if I refuse?"

"Then it shall be my painful duty to have you removed hence!"

"You dare not turn us out of doors. My mother is an invalid, and there is no law that will permit you to turn us out short of three months' warning."

"Perhaps not. I have not consulted the law on the subject. If I am determined to turn you out, there are ways in which you can be ousted."

"Mr. Gardner, will you have no mercy upon us? We are two lone, defenseless women, dependent upon our needles for support. It would be very hard for us to be turned out of house and home, and have to pay rent."

"I am well aware of that, Mrs. Heath, and that is why I urge your daughter to become my wife. Then you could both have the comfort and elegance of a rich man's home."

"But Jessie cannot marry you—will not, sir. She does not care about getting married."

"A little courting, I believe, would dissipate her prejudices," the mine-owner suggested with a grin.

Jessie laughed outright, a ringing little laugh of sarcasm.

"Were I ever to be courted, I could easily pick out any one among the miners, preferable to you, Ralph Gardner!" she retorted. "Though you endeavor by dress and looking-glass study to make yourself attractive, the effort is useless. People of sound judgment would regard you with derision!"

Ralph Gardner's face flamed redly at this cut. He sprang to his feet and advanced a step, threateningly. But he paused when Jessie seized a cowhide whip from the chimney corner, and held it ready, with a firm hand.

"Curse you, you little tigress!" he gritted, hoarsely, "your tongue is as sharp as a knife-blade. But, never mind; resist though you may, you shall be mine yet—ay! I swear it, by all I hold sacred—swear that you shall be mine. Then I shall spend my whole time in taming you, until you are broken in spirit and as humble as a wild colt that has passed through the tamer's hands. Ha! ha! I already foresee the sport I shall have, my peerless Jessie. You will find then how merciless a man can be. As to this house—I give you until to-morrow night at sunset to get out, bag and baggage. If you fail to get out by that time you will rue it!"

"I defy you!" Jessie cried, "and so does mamma. Do your worst, Ralph Gardner. Now, go—get out of our presence, or I will teach you a lesson you may have not yet learned!"

And whip in hand, Jessie advanced in a way that meant business.

With a curse he retreated to the door, and sped away into the night.

Then it was that poor Jessie's courage failed her, and dropping on her knees by her mother's chair, she burst into tears.

"Oh! mamma! mamma! we are in the midst of a great trouble. We shall soon be turned out of doors, poor, friendless and helpless. What shall we do?"

CHAPTER V.

THE PET ELEPHANT'S DEFEAT—CAPTAIN HAWK'S BULLETIN.

SIR NOEL FARNSWORTH, once the sluggish blood in his veins was aroused, was an expeditious worker.

After arriving in Leadville, and installing his mother and brother at the Tontine, he set out in search of aid for the recovery of Lady Belle. Inquiry of different ones resulted in a general shake of the head.

"Ef ye've got any one in ther hands o' Captain Hawk, ye'd better leave 'em thar, 'ca'se how ye'll most likely git plugged right thru ther kernoodleum, ter once!" they all said. "Thet Hawk be one cuss-an-a-half, an' I'll allow them as ever tried ter war ag'in' him have got a coat o' war in return."

Failing to derive any satisfaction from these replies, Sir Noel hunted up Sheriff Jo Murphy, and laid his case before him.

The sheriff was a shrewd little Irishman, with a red face and red hair, whose sole solace appeared to be in a common clay pipe, which he held in his mouth.

He listened to Sir Noel's narrative with one eye closed, and the other directed upon the visitor, a thoughtful expression upon his face.

When Sir Noel had concluded his narration, he said:

"It be a divil of a fix yez be got yer sister in, me lord. This Captain Hawk has a retreat somewhere in the mountains, where with his force av fifty or more bloody spalpeens he be invulnerable, they say. An', as for Deadwood Dick, bad luck to him, the divil himself couldn't catch him, at all. He goes and comes whenever it plazes him, and begorra! there's nary a hand quick enough to reach him, or a bullet good enough to drap him."

"From what I saw of the fellow, the more you let him alone the more he'll let you alone!" Sir Noel suggested.

"Ah! bad luck to his picture; it's mesilf as will not let the spalpeen alone! He has bid defiance to the law, and by my soul, it is Jo Murphy as will yet tache him a trick wid a hole in it."

"But, laying aside his past, as a thing which is past, is he not doing more good to the traveling public than any one else?" and then Sir Noel

related all about his encounter with the Prince of the Road.

Murphy listened, grimly.

"He's bin mighty accommodatin' to yez, I'll admit, sur, but it's not every poor son av a gun gets tr'ated that way. Twixt you an' me, there's divil a man but is 'fraid as dith av either he or Captain Hawk."

"I am inclined to believe that Deadwood Dick will do as he has said, in every case!" Sir Noel replied. "But, that is neither here nor there. It was not he who stole my sister, and I shall not wage war against him. In the case of this captain Hawk, what do you propose to do, or, what do you advise me to do?"

"Faith, it's sorry little ye can do, I am afraid, Sir Noel. It would be rash to venture into the mountain in search of the bandits, for by their own number, it's ivery man av us they could surround and cut ter pieces. The only way will be to sthick up some papers, offering a reward for the capture av Captain Hawk, purporting to be your offer; and another lot signed by me, offering a reward for the return of your sister. That's nary anither plan to aqual it, I believe. How much reward do yez want me to offer?"

"Just whatever you choose. I shall not stand about dollars, if I can get my sister back safely."

"Thin I will have some bills put out at once. Ye kin rest a few days, yer honor, an' if we don't hear from yer leddy, we'll adopt some other plan av action. But it's meself that believes the money will bring Captain Hawk to the front in thrue Skidmore style!"

Sir Noel took leave of the sheriff, and walked back toward the Tontine Hotel, through the crowded street, trying to make himself believe that he was comforted by the advice he had received. But it was meager satisfaction after all.

He thought a great deal of Lady Belle; she was his pet, and he hers, since they had grown up from childhood. For she and Sir Noel were unlike the rest of the family, except old Sir Roderick, who possessed some of their free, pleasant nature.

From the cradle Chandos had been ugly and of a quarrelsome disposition, and had Sir Noel not been of a mild temperament the two could not have lived under the same roof together.

There had been another brother, older yet than Noel but he had turned out badly, and had been sent to the penal colonies years before.

The matter had been hushed up, so that very few knew where he was, or if they did, they were ignorant of what crime he went for, and as old Sir Roderick had utterly disowned and disinherited him none cared where he was.

The estate by entailment in the house of Farnsworth, of course descended to the eldest son, together with the title, but in case of the death of the eldest son or his disinheritance it descended to the second son.

Thus it was, that, though a younger brother, Sir Noel had inherited the whole Farnsworth wealth, together with the title.

Being unmarried, he had always kept his mother, sister and brother with him, although Chandos and Lady Farnsworth often gave him much cause for provocation, and put him to great expense.

Returning along the street, he was attracted by a large crowd to one side of a little vacant lot, where a man was lying on the ground.

Upon approaching nearer, he perceived that he was dead. A bullet hole in the forehead had done the work.

"What is the matter?" Sir Noel asked, of a big red-shirted miner, who stood by. "Has murder been done?"

"I should smile!" the miner replied, with a chuckle. "Ye see thet galoot what is a corpus, stranger? Waal, he tuk a notion into his head that he war a-goin' ter capter Captain Hawk, the bandit. You see how he suckseeded. They jest found his carcass a-layin' on ther trail, up above here. Oh! I'll allow thet Hawk's not a-goin' ter be captered w' chaff, like us crows!"

Turning away, Sir Noel continued along the street, until he came to the Casino, where he paused, and curiosity finally prompted him to enter. It was not often he looked into gambling dens; indeed, he had never visited one of these wild Western palaces of game.

Upon his entrance, he found the room nearly full of men of all types of character, the same as they were upon the streets.

But the principal attention seemed to be centered upon a drunken bullwhacker, of gigantic size, who was parading about like a strutting cock, and using his mouth after true bullwhacker fashion.

He was fully six feet and a half in height, and correspondingly bulky of limb and trunk, with swelling muscles, and feet of tremendous size. His head was even too large for the size of his body, and was covered with a stubble of grizzly hair, as was the greater share of his face. His eyes were bleared and vicious in their expression, and his large mouth exposed a row of fang-like teeth that were anything but handsome. He was clad in ragged, greasy garments, several sizes too small for him, and a battered stove-pipe hat—probably the only one in all Leadville—was cocked upon his head.

Altogether he was a hard-looking citizen, and in his short residence in Leadville, had set himself up as "boss" of the town. Few were there who cared to cross him, or dispute his assertion that he was monarch wherever he went, for he had shown his authority, at once, by killing several men.

Justice let him alone. He was regarded with terror by the majority of the citizens, and no one dared to tackle him.

And this giant's name was Beautiful Bill.

He was parading around, singing a bacchanalian song, but the minute Sir Noel entered, he stopped short, and glared savagely toward him.

"Hello! kerwhoop! W'at in the name o' ther seven planets hev we here? Lookee, will ye, my gay brethern, and behold thet snoozer, will ye—an Englisier, I'll bet my old hat! Say, ye galoot, d'ye know me—d'ye ever hev ther pleasure o' my acquaintance?"

And straight up to the baronet, the giant pranced, with a leer of triumph.

Sir Noel stepped to one side, to pass, but Beautiful Bill again confronted him with a chuckle.

"Hold yer hosses, my darling, or I'll mount ye and gnaw off yer nose, now, you hear me remark! I'll allow I'm boss of this town, an' them as sez I ain't don't live long in these parts. I'm Beautiful Bill, I am—Beautiful Bill the Charmer, they call me, fer short. Don't remember of havin' heerd o' me? Waal, thet's singular. Webster defines me as a man o' great importance—a Northern Light in ther sky o' ther West—a sort o' second cuzzin ter ther planet o' Jupiter, ye see!"

"I don't care who you are. Let me pass; if you don't I'll summon aid!"

"Oh! ye'll summon aid, wull ye? Ye won't notice ther great Pet Elephant o' ther Leadville trail, eh? Sayee, lookee hyar, ye durned little British rooster, d'ye know what I've a mind ter do w' ye? D'ye know, I say? Waal, I'll tell ye. I've got seven kinds o' a notion ter jest swallow ye, jest like Joner did the whale. An' hayr's the trimmer fer thet same liddle exploit, ef ye don't git down on yer knees fer thet same liddle slack o' yer tongue. Kneel, durn ye, and apologize ter ther Pet Elephant o' ther Leadville trail, or I'll gobble ye up like a cat will a young rat. You near me, Beautiful Bill!"

"And you hear me!" Sir Noel cried angrily, "that if you don't remove yourself, and allow me to pass, it will be the worse for you. Though somewhat smaller, I am not in the least afraid of you."

A faint cheer went up from the crowd that had gathered around.

None had they ever seen before, who dared to face Beautiful Bill thus boldly.

And the giant was even somewhat astonished, for he glared at Sir Noel with a greenish glitter in his eyes, as if he could not believe the evidence of his senses.

"You talk thet way to me!" he gasped, hoarsely, his fingers working convulsively—"you talk thet way ter me, the great second cuzzin ter Satan an' Jupiter! Haw! haw! why, ye liddle banty, I'll chaw ye all inter coyote fodder in less time'n it takes ter cook a Chinaman. I see plainly thet ye don't relize my tremendous calibre—my importance as a respected an' law-abidin' citizen. Why, I've got a leetle private grave-yard o' my own, outside o' town hayr, whar I've made funerals fer sech carvortin' pilgarlics as ye!"

"Once and for the last time, are you going to remove yourself from my path?" Sir Noel demanded sternly.

"No, sir-ee!" the giant replied, "not of ther court knows herself, and she rightly concludes that she do. Ther Pet Elephant o' ther Leadville trail is a king, and don't step aside fer anybody."

"Then take that, and reflect upon it; you overgrown ruffian, and let it be a lesson to you!" and, springing suddenly forward, and into the air, Sir Noel planted his right fist squarely between the giant's eyes, with sledge-

hammer effect, for Beautiful Bill dropped like a log.

Only stunned, however, for he staggered back to his feet, with a terrible roar of pain and rage.

A ring upon one of Sir Noel's fingers hit at an ugly gash upon the bridge of his nose, from which the blood spurted, copiously.

Blood blinded, the Pet Elephant of the Leadville trail glared around until his eyes rested upon Sir Noel, who had borrowed a knife from one of the bystanders, and stood coolly awaiting an onslaught.

"Cuss ye!" he gasped, wiping away the blood with his coat-sleeve. "Cuss ye, ye durned Britisher. Lend me a knife, sumbody, an' watch me carve him. Watch me dissect his carcass!"

Ralph Gardner, standing near by, tendered the giant a long, handsomely mounted blade, a greedy, wolfish glitter in his eyes.

Seizing the knife, Beautiful Bill made a lunge forward, a frightful oath upon his lips.

A murmur of anxiety ran through the crowd, for it was expected that Sir Noel would be butchered on the spot, so much faith had these Leadvilleites in the prowess of the giant.

But they were disappointed in their expectations.

Sir Noel met the onslaught with a skillful parry, and then, throwing himself quickly upon the Pet Elephant, drove his knife to the hilt in his shoulder.

For the second time that night Beautiful Bill went tumbling to the floor, this time not to rise, though howl after howl of pain escaped his lips, while a thundering cheer greeted this act of the baronet's.

"You have done the country an invaluable service!" Thoroughbred Tom said, coming forward out of the crowd, to shake Sir Noel's hand. "But you want to keep an eye out, now, for the bullwhacker is as revengeful as a Spaniard, and has plenty of backing among the ruffians. He'll nab at you some of these times, if you don't look sharp."

"Thank you for your advice. I shall look out for him," Sir Noel replied. "I should not have touched him, but he forced me into it."

"You did perfectly right. If you had killed him, you would have done a good job. By the way, have you heard the news?"

"To what do you allude?"

"To the news concerning this bandit scourge, Captain Hawk. He has threatened, it is reported, to come down here with his men, and take the town, and the mines. A scout has just come in from Malta and Adelaide City, and states that large gangs of ruffianly characters are leaving for the fastnesses of the mountains, where it is supposed they intend to join the bandit forces."

"God pity my poor sister!" Sir Noel groaned, in anguish of spirit. "Do you think she will be harmed?"

"No, I do not," Thoroughbred Tom replied.

"Captain Hawk, though a veritable fiend, seemingly, is said never to misuse a prisoner. He captures them for the purpose of extorting a ransom. If the ransom is not forthcoming, he kills them, but does not in any other way ill-treat them."

"Where is his stronghold?"

"That I do not know, nor do any of those who are not in league with him. He would seem to have many, for different bodies of his gang operate at different points at the same time, and if pursued, escape as easily as if the earth had opened up to swallow them."

Shortly after the twain parted. Sir Noel returned to the Tontine, while Thoroughbred Tom, went to Izzard's lodging-house upon State street.

The following morning was the beginning, literally, of a new era, in the history of Leadville—an epoch witnessing many strange and startling scenes.

For with the rising of the sun, there were found posted up all through the town huge posters, hand printed, bearing the following:

"NOTICE:—To whom it may consarn. I am sworn thet ther town o' Leadville ar' doomed. Warning is given, fairly, to all who wish to save life and limbs, that unless they take advantage of the next ten hours to *pukechee*, they won't be allowed to escape, but will be hedged in, and massacred. I have a standin' army, who are impatient to come to battle. Leadville is mine, and I am bound to have it. This is my only notice.
CAPTAIN HAWK!"

This was all, but it was enough to set all Leadville in a *furor* of excitement, for they believed that war was upon them. Enough had they seen and heard of Captain Hawk, to believe that he would keep his threat.

Not to be scared out, were they, however, by any means.

Crowds were soon organized, ready for fight, with orders to shoot down any roughs who showed sign of treachery, for that was proof enough that they were of Hawk's gang.

Posters were got out by Sheriff Jo Murphy, and tacked up on every approach to the town, and in all the saloons.

There were two different kinds. One read as follows:

"\$5,000 REWARD! Five thousand dollars reward will be paid by me, for the capture, alive, of the notorious bandit chief, Captain Hawk, or any dozen of his men, and deliverance of the same into my custody at Leadville. Jo MURPHY, Sheriff."

The other poster contained the following:

"Whereas, we the Adjusters and Regulators of Leadville, have judged and found guilty of the misdemeanor, road-agency, we do hereby offer \$100 reward for the arrest and deliverance of Deadwood Dick—result of said decision being against him."

"Signed RALPH GARDNER, See'y."

CHAPTER VI.

RALPH GARDNER'S SCHEMING—DEADWOOD DICK'S RETURN—CASTLE HAWK.

On the following morning, or the same on which Captain Hawk's posters were found stuck up around the town, Ralph Gardner made it his business to visit the vicinity of the Tontine hotel. Of course he was there for a purpose, and that purpose was one of great importance to him.

The time wore away, without evident satisfaction to him, and he was at last about turning away in disgust, when, leaning upon his cane, Chandos Farnsworth limped from the hotel, out upon the covered veranda, in front.

Gardner's eyes assumed a triumphant gleam as he saw him, and writing upon a card, he approached and handed it to Chandos, with a bow.

"Perhaps you may not have recognized me, if you have seen me!" he said, with a cynical little laugh. "I thought I would drop around and renew your acquaintance, since you had come so far to meet me."

Chandos turned from reading the card, and gazed the young mine-owner over with a sharp, criticising glance.

"If it is indeed you," he said, indifferently, "I am glad to see you looking so well. I supposed you in Van—"

"Hush! you need not mention the place aloud!" Gardner finished, nervously, with a glance about. "I want to talk with you, so come to my office down at the Specter Mine, and have a little chat over old times."

"Really, I can't. It would exhaust me too much!" Chandos replied, sinking into a chair. "If you had a carriage—"

"Hang the carriage! You're no better to walk than I. Come along, and cast aside those imagined afflictions of yours."

At last persuaded, Chandos accompanied Gardner down the street, and then over onto Fryer Hill. Here, in a large grove of pines, overlooking the town, stood a couple of buildings, one a cabin, and the other a small, white shanty, bearing upon a sign over the door the word—

"OFFICE."

Into this Ralph Gardner conducted the young Englishman, and the two were soon seated by a table, in a snug little room, with a bottle of straight whisky and a box of cigars between them.

Then it was that Gardner was more at his ease.

"Now, first of all, what ever brought you to this wilderness, away from the turmoil and social honor of London?" he asked, curiously.

"It was not my fault!" Chandos replied, growlingly. "Sir Noel and Belle were the instigators of the expedition."

"Through the operation I've been wounded by road-agents, to say nothing of jolting about through an execrable country. I wish I'd staid in Chicago, where people are at least more civilized!"

"Where is Belle?"

"The devil only knows. She was jerked out of the wagon back here, when we were running a gantlet, through a road-agent attack, and that's the last we have seen of her."

"Sho! Captured by road-agents, eh? By which celebrity—Captain Hawk, or the notorious Deadwood Dick?"

"By the former."

"What effort is Sir Noel making to find and recover her?"

"I scarcely know; I have been so much more interested in nursing my arm than in inquiring about her, that I have not posted myself."

Ralph Gardner laughed.

"Then I am to infer that you are not in mourning over the loss of our sister, eh?"

"You may infer what you please," Chandos grunted, tossing off the second glass of whisky. "You doubtless know that I never was so much in love with or attached to my family, as some people might expect. It was never an ingredient in my nature to be so."

"Then you can call yourself my brother, for those were ever my exact sentiments. Families consisting of brothers, sisters or mothers, are all well enough in their proper places, but when they get out of their places, and into one's way, they are not desirable. Is that not your opinion of matters?"

"To some extent, yes."

"Good. I believe we shall get along capitally together. You do not like to see Sir Noel commanding Farnsworth Heath, and I do not either."

"But that's all the good it does. He is heir by your disinheritance, and can hold the estate and all the wealth."

"To be sure. But if death were accidentally to overtake him here in this wild country, he would not be heir. Oh! no! the estate would then revert to the line of entailment, and I, Sir Roy Farnsworth, baronet, would become its rightful owner."

"I am afraid not," Chandos answered, with evident satisfaction. "Sir Roy Farnsworth dare not show himself in London, or in England again, for fear of being apprehended, and sent back to Van Dieman's Land."

"Curse it, you are right. But for that I might as well be heir of Farnsworth as well as not, instead of being simply a mine-owner in this rude city of Leadville."

"Therefore, after Sir Noel's death, the estate will come to me," Chandos added, triumphantly. "I step in ahead of you, because of your criminal record."

"Well, I don't see as anything particularly can be realized by having Sir Noel die at present," Ralph Gardner declared, reflectively. "But ere he leaves the place, he shall feel my hand, although I do not show it."

"How do you mean?"

"That, I cannot tell, precisely. But it is enough to say that I bear him no good will, although he is my brother. He could have saved me that trip to the penal colonies, but he chose to let me go, and suffer the punishment of every murderer, rather than to help me out. I swore then that I would do him an ill turn, before I died, and I mean to do it!"

Chandos was silent, but puffed leisurely at his cigar.

"Whatever you do," he said, at length, "don't spoil his finances, for I have to depend upon him for my cash. You know I never soil my hands with manual labor, and were his bank to fail, I should be in a deuce of a fix."

"Never fear. All I get out of him, I shall share equally with you, my dear brother. For I may need to use you yet. A few more questions I have to ask of you, and then you may go. How much money or other wealth has Sir Noel in his possession now?"

"Very little. Deadwood Dick took possession of all we had, as we were coming here."

"Deadwood Dick?"

"Ay—the road-agent. He pounced down on us, and demanded all our valuables, promising to return them as soon as we arrived in Leadville. He claimed that he was a protective-agent for the public, and took this plan to thwart the bandit, Captain Hawk."

"A clever lie, no doubt. He may, however, return the money and jewels, as they say he is a man of his word. How much did he take in all?"

"About two thousand dollars from Sir Noel, a hundred from me, and some odd change from the women, including the Farnsworth jewels."

"They are worth fifty thousand dollars, are they not?"

"Probably, for there are many rare old jewels."

"Then, if they should be returned, you tell me. Those jewels and the money shall be ours—ours, understand you, equally divided. You may go now. Don't mention meeting with me, lest Sir Noel should trouble me with too much of his brotherly affection. A possible twenty-five or thirty thousand apiece would not be bad, eh?"

"Indeed, no!" Chandos replied, his eyes sparkling. "I shall not decline to accept a share, you may rest assured."

Sir Noel was standing upon the steps of the Tontine, that morning, when a ragged urchin

approached him, carrying a compact little bundle, wrapped in heavy wrapping-paper.

"Can you tell me where I'll find Sir Noel Farnsworth, boss?" he demanded, stopping in front of Sir Noel, and eying him, sharply. "Be you him?"

"I should say I was, if I were truthfully inclined, my lad," Sir Noel replied. "What do you want of me?"

"Hayr's a package for you, I reckon. A chap sed as how he'd give me a quarter to fetch it to you," and the urchin handed the bundle to Sir Noel.

"Very well. What sort of a looking man was it to you?"

"You can't prove it by me, sir. I wasn't to answer no questions," and doffing his hat, respectfully, the lad hurried away.

Sir Noel went to his room at once, and eagerly untied the package. When untied, he beheld his wallet, together with those taken from the ladies Farnsworth and Chandos—also, a smaller package containing watches, and jewelry, and the handsome casket of the family jewels.

All were inclosed, according to Deadwood Dick's promise.

Examination of the pocketbooks revealed all in them intact with the exception that a hundred dollar note had been extracted from Sir Noel's wallet. In its place, however, was a piece of paper, bearing the following message, in a round, fair hand:

"DEADWOOD DICK'S CAMP."

"MR. FARNSWORTH, DEAR SIR:

"Enclosed you will find all of your valuables, with the exception of \$100 dollars, which I deduct for my time and trouble in your behalf. Let me advise you to look out for enemies. They are thick around you. Also, to deposit your valuables, especially your jewels, in the hands of Levi, the Jew. He is trusty, and will keep them safely for you, while, if you keep them about you, you are liable to be robbed at any moment. Truly, etc."

"DEADWOOD DICK."

"He is honest, at least!" Sir Noel muttered, thoughtfully, "and, road-agent as he is, he at least has my friendship, henceforth, and my aid, if he needs it. Why would he not be the right man to set in search of Lady Belle? I would that I could see him and enlist him further in my service!"

Lady Belle Farnsworth, in the meanwhile, had been spirited away to the retreat of Captain Hawk.

In the attack of the banditti upon the previous night, a pair of strong arms had reached into the wagon and drawn her out.

The realization that she was in the power of the ruffians caused her to faint; consequently she knew no more until again restored to consciousness.

Then it was that she found herself helplessly bound, and held in the arms of a bewhiskered, masked man, who, mounted upon a powerful horse, was pushing through a heavy pine forest. Nor was he alone, for behind him galloped a score or more of men, similarly attired and masked, and armed with rifles.

The animals seemed to know the way, for they proceeded with a loose rein.

Although conscious, Lady Belle was careful not to betray her consciousness, lest she should be subjected to more indignities than though she kept quiet, and feigned insensibility. And so, in this manner, she rode, keeping her eyes open when practicable, and listening as she was carried away.

At last they began to ascend the mountains, and the horses were reined down to a slow walk. For hours, it seemed, they wound around through gaps and fissures, in their upward flight, until they came out on a natural ledge or plateau, comprising about a half-dozen acres, hemmed in on three sides by perpendicular walls of solid rock, which even a chipmunk could not have scaled, so high they were.

The fourth side overlooked a yawning gulf, with the narrow path worming its way onto the mountain as the only place where footing could be held. It was a frightful ascent, and not one in a hundred not knowing of the plateau would have guessed its existence.

Here it was that the bandits drew rein and dismounted.

The man who carried Lady Belle descended from his saddle, and turning, addressed a tall, thin individual, who had also dismounted.

"See that the horses and men are fed well, Marmosa, for there is more work before us soon. If I am wanted for anything important, you will find me in the castle."

So saying, he strode away, carrying Lady

Belle partly over his shoulder with greatest apparent ease.

Her face being to the rear, as he proceeded, she was able to gaze around her, considerably, without his seeing her.

The night was illumined by a young moon, making objects discernible at a considerable distance.

The plateau seemed to have at some remote date been quarried out of the solid rock of the mountain, for it was smooth and even, as were the walls, which hemmed it in on three sides.

A greater part of it was covered by an edifice which the chief had rightly called a castle, for it was built of massive stone, three stories in height, with many odd little windows and niches, and two turrets or towers pointed up skyward, at either end. It was an unsightly pile, overgrown with moss and clinging vines, evidencing the fact that it had stood there many years.

A wide covered court or passageway appeared to be the principal entrance, for through this the bandit carried Lady Belle, and into an inner square, where flowers and shrubs grew in tubs containing dirt, and emitted a gratifying fragrance. Passing on through this square, the bandit re-entered a continuation of the castle.

After traversing a narrow passageway for some distance, he ascended a pair of stone steps and entered a large room, which was lighted by a lamp suspended from the ceiling.

Upon a couch he laid Lady Belle, and in the action he saw that her eyes were open, and that she was conscious.

"Oho! so ye've cum to, eh?" he said, surveying her with a pair of fierce gray eyes that gleamed through the holes in his mask. "Well, what do you think of your new quarters?"

Lady Belle sat up, resolving to be brave. She had inherited courage from her father, stern old Sir Roderick, and it was the kind of courage which manifests itself in an hour of emergency. "I do not like them at all," she said, coldly.

"Why have you brought me here?"

"Because you are a valuable bird," the bandit replied, with a smile. "You are a valuable bird to bring to my cage, for the simple reason that you will command a large ransom. You probably do not know me?"

"How should I know you?"

"Well, that's so! You were but a mere baby when I saw you last."

"You saw me? When did you ever see me, pray?" Lady Belle demanded, wonderingly.

"Oho! I saw you when you were a yearling babe in your mother's arms, at Farnsworth Heath. I never supposed I should be honored by a visit from you."

"Who are you?"

"I am Captain Harriot Hawk, the bandit."

"The murderous outlaw fiend?"

"The same, if you so please to call me. I once had another name, but it matters not about it now, for it is many years since I have been called by it."

"You are a bad man," Lady Belle said, coldly. "Why should you bring me away from my people, when I have never harmed you?"

"As I said before, it was for the sake of making money that I brought you here. Your brother, Sir Noel, is very well fixed in this world's goods, and will pay handsomely to have you restored to him."

"You may be mistaken. I do not believe he would gratify you thus. He would quicker organize a force of men, and come to my rescue."

"Ha! ha! he would have a fine time reaching me! Understand you, my lady, I am the king of robbers in this wild region, and some day not far distant, it is my scheme to own and control the whole sweep of mountains in this vicinity. I am lodged here where no one short of the Almighty himself can oust me out. It is not in the power of man to do so. I am daily gathering around me hosts of men who are eager to serve under my flag, which shall soon wave from the turrets of Castle Hawk. So you see, that when, even now, I can call two hundred men to my aid, there is no hope of your brother ever reaching this stronghold alive. Should he make the attempt and refuse to pay the ransom I ask, you shall receive the same treatment meted out to all my prisoners who fail to get ransom."

"And that is—"

"Death, my lady—death by a hundred rifle-bullets. But we will hope that your brother will see the advisability of ransoming you and saving your life. Until then, you shall have all the freedom and courtesies of the stronghold, together with the constant attention of a lady's maid, who is my own daughter. It is useless for you to attempt to escape, as you

would only court instant death, where, if you remain, peaceably, you will probably in a few days be restored to your family. Respectfully, Lady Farnsworth, I bid you adieu."

And turning he strode from the room.

CHAPTER VII.

A DISCOVERY—A GHOST—AND A CRIME.

A MAN came out from the Clarendon hotel, on Harrison avenue, Leadville, and walked through State street to Chestnut, and hurried along through that main thoroughfare, which as usual was crowded to overflowing. Without pausing to look right or left he kept on until he reached the outskirts of the town.

It was early evening, and the stars overhead were making it light upon the little main street, where swarmed the populace.

The man whom we have seen, was the Vigilante chief of the town, who had but lately taken his stand as such, under the name of Thoroughbred Tom.

At the edge of the town he entered a clump of heavy chaparral, and was gone for some time—for good, perhaps, unless he could be identified with the masked horseman who rode out a half an hour later, and set off at a gallop, down into California gulch.

For the horseman was Deadwood Dick!

Three men immediately afterward emerged from an opposite bunch of bushes, and gazed after the Prince of the Road, as he galloped away.

They were Ralph Gardner, Jo Murphy the sheriff, and Simon Kent, one of the principal mine-owners in the Leadville district. And it was evident that they had come out here for a purpose.

"You see for yourselves!" Ralph Gardner said, triumphantly, pointing after the receding road-agent. "The man who entered the chaparral was he we know as Thoroughbred Tom, and who heads our Regulators and Adjusters. When he went in, he was Thoroughbred Tom. As he comes out he has changed to the character known as Deadwood Dick!"

"It seems incredible that he should have been among us, unknown," Simon Kent said, in astonishment. "I have often heard of him, but never expected to find him in our midst."

"Nor me, by jabs!" decided Jo Murphy. "It's the devil's own imp I'd 'ave quicker expected to rattle me eyes on. Arrah! but it's a fine jig we'll cause Mither Deadwood Dick to dance, when we catch his nibs!"

"Yes, he shall not long for a tight rope, without getting it this time. All we have to do is keep quiet, and nab him when he is in the character of Thoroughbred Tom. Then, we can string him up on short notice, for his many crimes."

"Thin yez'll have to do it yourself!" replied Murphy, "for bein' a ripresentative av the law, it's not becomin' av me to lynch without a trial."

"Well, give him a trial, then," Gardner said, sarcastically. "I can scour up enough evidence against him in an hour, to hang a dozen men."

This same evening, it was, that the mine-owner had threatened to turn the Heaths from their cabin. But it was not his purpose to show his hand in it, as he was proud of his position as a citizen in Leadville.

After leaving the sheriff and Simon Kent, he hastened to his office, and for several hours sat and smoked, alternating with his writing.

He at last arose and left the office, and entered the cabin, close by, which covered the mouth of the shaft to one of his mines.

"I must drop down into the mine, and see how things are progressing here," he muttered, as he stepped into the bucket, and motioned for the engineer to let him down.

The engine immediately began to work, and the rope on the bull-wheel to unslack, and the bucket shot down rapidly into the bowels of the earth.

Down—down—down into the Stygian gloom, until the speed was lessened, and the bucket touched bottom. The mine-owner stepped out into a passageway, where tons of the carbonates were piled up on either side.

Following through the passageway, which was not lighted, Ralph Gardner kept on until something more than ordinary caused him to pause.

He was aware of a something awful in his presence, and his hair began to feel tight.

The mine was reported haunted by a genuine specter, by the miners, but Ralph Gardner had never yet seen it, or had any faith in the stories. He now seemed surrounded by a strange halo

of bluish, whitish light, but could see no object, although he gazed around him, sharply.

"Curse me for an idiot," he growled, endeavoring to quiet his nerves, and regain his scattered courage. "Why am I thus cowardly? I am not afraid of a dozen specters, for there are no such things!"

Bracing himself with this decision, he stepped briskly forward until he came opposite a short drift, or niche, in one side of the passage.

Up the drift he saw the specter moving rapidly toward him.

The specter, true enough—a tall, white-robed figure, surrounded by a strange halo of whitish light—a specter of the most frightful nature, for in the place of the head was the grinning, fleshless skull of a skeleton.

This much Gardner saw; then, with a horrified yell, he turned and fled as if he were pursued by all the demons of the infernal regions.

About this time Mrs. Heath and Jessie sat in their cabin, awaiting the coming of Ralph Gardner to turn them out.

They had no doubt but that he would keep good his threat, but they were resolved not to yield until forced to.

It had been a great change in their family, within a few months.

From a far-away Eastern home they had come to Leadville the previous fall, hoping, with a "thousand and one" others, to soon accumulate enough wealth so that they could return to their native State in comfortable circumstances.

Mr. Heath had obtained work at once, and soon struck a bargain for the little cabin where they lived.

Beyond this, and the fact that money came in more freely, Mrs. Heath and Jessie knew little. He was a very reticent and eccentric man, who locked his own business affairs in his own keeping, not explaining either his success or loss in business to his family. But it was currently supposed that he owned the Wild-cat Mine, since named "The Specter Mine."

But of course this was only conjecture, as he had never said as much to his family, or to any one.

One morning the mangled remains of a man were found in the shaft.

Identification was impossible, as but a few shreds of flesh and a few bones were left, the body having been thoroughly dissected and dragged off by the great mine rats.

It was, however, supposed to be the miner, Morris Heath, as he could not be found elsewhere, and his hat was near the remains.

Immediately after his death Mrs. Heath caused inquiries to be instituted in regard to the Wild-cat Mine, but disappointment awaited her, for Ralph Gardner had stepped forward, claiming that he was the owner of the property, and had employed the deceased miner; also, denying that Morris Heath ever owned a dollar in the lode.

Of course, having no proof to the contrary, Mrs. Heath and her daughter could do nothing more in the matter, and nothing was left for them to do but depend upon their needlework and an occasional job of washing for their living, which they had done since their loss, although Mrs. Heath was much confined to her invalid-chair by rheumatism.

Jessie, however, was plucky and willing to work, and through their united efforts they managed to eke out a comfortable livelihood, although at times Mrs. Heath grew disheartened.

Not so with sweet Jessie, whose spirits were ever buoyant.

But to-night both mother and daughter were anxious, for they knew not what the next hour might bring forth.

Well aware of Ralph Gardner's evil nature, they could but expect that he would do them some ill turn, even though he should not actually attempt to drive them from the cabin.

"I don't believe he will try to do that," Jessie said, anxiously, "for that would not give him food for his wolfish passion of revenge. I should quicker think that he would attempt to burn the cabin down over our heads, or perhaps poison the water we drink."

"I am afraid of him, myself, dear, and I feel that we are running a great risk in staying here alone. If we could get Mrs. Davy and her husband to come and stay with us until I am able to leave my chair, I should feel safer!" Mrs. Heath said.

"Then, mamma, I'll run across the hill to their cabin and ask them. Would you be afraid to stay alone?"

"No, child. Just wheel my chair around facing the door, and lay your father's revolver

where I can reach it. But, are you not afraid to go out through the lonely way between here and Davy's?"

"No, not a bit! I have been over the same route before, a dozen times, without getting hurt. I guess I won't be, this time. A kiss, now, and I will be off."

And after obeying her mother's instructions, Jessie kissed her, and hurried out of the cabin.

The night was dimly lighted by the young moon and stars, and she was enabled to see the route over the rough hill with its dottings of shanties, most of which were occupied as shaft houses or engine rooms.

Taking a well-beaten path, she hastened swiftly along until—

When she was midway between her own home and her destination, and in a lonely spot, a half dozen men stepped suddenly out of the bushes, and seized her, smothering her cries quickly by throwing a blanket over her head.

They then dragged her into the bushes, and into a sort of inner glade, where a score more of men were waiting with horses.

Here Jessie's arms were bound, and as soon as the blanket was removed, a revolver was thrust against her temple as a warning of silence.

All the men were masked, and armed to the teeth, as Jessie could see.

"So you've got the girl, eh?" demanded a deep voice, and Captain Harriot Hawk emerged from further in the chaparral. "Well, it's lucky you caught her without trouble. You are to remain here, while I ride on and finish the job!"

"You ruffian, do you mean to molest my poor mother?" Jessie cried, indignantly.

"No, little girl, I shall not harm her in the least!" Captain Hawk replied, with a low, brutal laugh, and vaulting into the saddle, he guided his horse from the chaparral, and was soon heard galloping away.

Poor Jessie! She was now in an agony of fear and suspense, for she believed that the terrible bandit meant murder.

There was that in his tone which caused her to think so.

In the meantime the bandit chief rode away toward the Heath cabin, at a gallop, a fierce expression hovering about his mouth. When he came in sight of the cabin, he dismounted, and crept cautiously forward on foot, not wishing to be heard.

On arriving close to the cabin, a peep in at the window revealed to him that Mrs. Heath was guarding the front door.

But another rear door offered him means of access, and by skillful maneuvering he finally succeeded in opening it, and gaining an entrance to the cabin, without raising a noise.

Step by step he crept forward toward Mrs. Heath, not making the least sound to betray his presence, until at last he was near enough to reach forward and grasp the revolver.

She uttered a shriek of alarm as he did this, and he then stepped around in front of her, with a triumphant laugh.

"Ha! ha! You see I was too sly for you, despite your vigilance!" he said, chuckling over his victory. "There's always two ways around a bush."

"Monster! Who are you?" Mrs. Heath gasped, pale with alarm. "Why do you come here, sir?"

"To see you, Margaret Heath, and kill you when I go!" Captain Hawk replied, with sudden fierceness. "Do you know me, woman—does not some instinct tell you who I am?"

"I do not know you, sir. You are no friend, and I want you to leave the house!"

"Pshaw! Margaret; don't be foolish. I am not affected in the least by what orders you may give. Here, I will remove my mask, and see if you know me then!" and true to his word, the bandit chieftain removed his mask.

It was a dark, repulsive face that was revealed, and Mrs. Heath gave a cry of recognition at sight of it—a face that was coarse and hairy, with a large sensual mouth, and eyes that were evil in their gaze.

"Fred Harriot!" Mrs. Heath gasped, paling.

"Ay, Fred Harriot, my dear—*alias* Captain Harriot Hawk, the bandit. I see you still carry me and my name in your memory, Margaret!"

"Monster! I loathe and detest you. Never so much as now!"

"All that may be true, Margaret, but there was a time when I should have won you had it not been for Morris Heath, curse him."

"No! Fred Harriot, you would never have won me, because I regarded you with aversion and detestation. But, why talk over a subject of so little interest? I pray you take your departure."

"Not until I know my fate, Margaret. I have come here to ask you once more to become my wife, and the queen of my castle. I do not ask you to love me; I simply ask you to become my wife. I have your daughter in my power, and you can thus be near her. Refuse, and I will kill you and make her my slave."

"Marry you?" the woman exclaimed, in scorn—"never, Fred Harriot, even though you were to kill me a dozen times!"

"What! not to save your child?"

"No! not even to save her, would I marry you, you wretch!"

"Then, by Heaven, you shall have the deaf you would court!" the bandit cried, savagely, and drawing a knife, he sprung forward upon her, and forcing her back in the chair, plunged the gleaming blade to the hilt in her bosom repeatedly.

Then he arose and hurried from the cabin, a hard-set look upon his ugly face.

Vaulting to the saddle, he struck the spurs fiercely into his horse, and galloped back to where he had left the men.

They were already mounted, and without halting he waved his hand, and dashed on, they following in his rear. Away to the mountain stronghold they went through the soft moonlight night.

Poor Jessie had long since fainted, as she pictured in her mind the murder of her mother, and consequently she knew nothing of the wild ride of the bandits, until she was safe within Castle Hawk, far up in the mountains.

Then, consciousness returned to her, and she found herself in a large stone room, lighted by large windows, and with a door looking out upon the plateau in front of the castle.

The furniture was rude, but serviceable, and the floors were laid with rugs of soft furry skins.

Captain Hawk stood near by, regarding her with a dark frown, when she aroused, and she shrunk away when she saw him.

"Oh! ye needn't be afraid!" he said, "for I shan't harm ye. A man as would harm an orphan would be mean enough to do anything!"

"An orphan?" Jessie gasped, paling.

"Ay, an orphan, for on my arrival at your cabin, Miss Jessie, I found that the assassin had been there ahead of me, and struck your mother's death-blow!"

And turning with these words, the bandit strode from the room, pale himself, as a picture of his terrible crime arose before his eyes. While he left behind him a white, motionless figure upon the floor.

It was not the first crime of this Captain Harriot Hawk. Many times before had he dyed his hand in human blood, in his career of a brigand, which had begun in the heart of Mexico, where dwelt the rich old rancheros on whom he preyed, until he had come to this mountain retreat, in order to be near Leadville and its hosts of people.

For in unity there is strength, and in strength there is money; and it was for this that Captain Harriot Hawk planned and schemed.

From the presence of Jessie Heath he strode to the mess-room of the band, an immense apartment in the castle, where the outlaws were wont to congregate to drink, smoke and gamble when not out upon the trail.

The room was full of brawny men as Captain Hawk entered—men with low brows, swarthy faces and evil gaze—a hard-looking set at the best.

All greeted with a nod their chief, and sat awaiting orders.

Instead of addressing them, however, Captain Hawk turned to his lieutenant, Marmosa.

"Are all the men in, lieutenant?"

"No, sir chief. There are three divisions yet out upon the trail."

"Why have they not returned?"

"That I do not know, chief. The stages may have been delayed."

"True. I hope they will bring in booty, for we must have it. Get the boys fed and ready for another ride. The posters have thrown Leadville into an excitement, and as soon as it subsides, I shall attack the place, and burn it to the ground. Was the wagon-train containing the coal oil captured?"

"Ay, chief, and fully five barrels secured and fetched here."

"Good! Let the men prepare enough combustible material to fire the town, for it shall be in ashes ere many nights, and the mines ours. Ha! who have we here?"

For two men had entered, conducting between them a third party, whom they had evidently captured, for his hands were bound behind his back.

"Release that man. He is a friend of mine!"

said Captain Hawk, sternly. "He has the freedom of my camp."

The man was Ralph Gardner!

CHAPTER VIII.

OUTWITTED—DEADWOOD DICK'S DEFIANCE.

A CROWD had collected in front of the Tontine House—a mob of stern-faced men and yelling ruffians—a crowd who were armed to the teeth, and were desperate looking enough to have frightened any ordinary man into submission.

"Deadwood Dick! Deadwood Dick, the outlaw!" were the cries heard on either hand. "Haul him out, dead or alive, and we'll hang him to the stiffest limb. Hooray for a reg'lar lynch!"

"Great conflagration ham-bone thet masticated ther larynx uv old Joner! Venerable old Moses in the bullrushes! w'at's ther rip hyar! Step aside, ye greasy pilgarics, and let in ther old boreal thunder-storm o' demolition, till he teeto'ly demolishes a half o' millyun o' ye! Give me room, fer ther Annihilation has begun a new keereer, despite o' rheumatism. Who sed Deadwood Dick—who mentioned that pet road-agent, I want ter know? Whar is he, ther galoot, until I cock my alphabetical eye at him?"

"He's in thar, old hoss," a miner said, pointing up into the second story of the Tontine. "He war spotted out by Sime Kent, and we're goin' ter stretch ther kinks out o' his neck, beautifully, when we git our hands ontar him."

"Ham-bone thet Joner eulogized! don't talk thet way, beloved pilgrim. It makes my hair grow pale ter hear ye. Ye don't know what instant annihilation threatens you, pilgrim. Ef ye war ter strain yer eyes for'a'd ye could see clean inter ther future, by thunder. Ketch thet angelic 'coon, my gay, festiverous Dickey! Never, sir, never! Hist'ry an' belle-letters hev proved thet ther job can't be did! Besides, I'll bet two shots from a pop-gun thet Dickey ain't up thar. Why, larst I heerd o' him he war up in ther neighborhood o' Deadwood!"

"Ken't help thet, old hoss. Deadwood Dick's come down into this region, an' begun his deviltry, an' now we've cornered him, and ar' a-goin' ter yank him up, in good shape. He'll find this ain't no Deadwood, by a long shot. Ye see he's sorter been playin' off on us in a disguise of Thoroughbred Tom, but Sime Kent, together wi' Ralph Gardner and Sheriff Murphy, they spotted him last night. An' a leetle while ago he sailed inter town, and now we've got 'im cornered, yonder in ther Tontine. So ef ye'll wait, ye'll hev an opperchunity ter witness a first-class raisin'!"

"Yas, in ther eye uv a blind pig!" Old Avalanche replied. "Great ham-bone, pilgrim, ye couldn't tech one side o' thet ar' Dickey! Fact, by gracious! Bet a jug o' tarant'ler some galoot w'at goes cavortin' too frisky around my Dickey 'll get a gripe in ther stumick so soon he won't know his aliybetty. Know'd o' sech a case, oncet, whar an Injun hed a curiosity ter embrace thet same Dickey, an' he got it kerslop right in the jaw, forinst. Et was good-by Injun, ye can bet yer socks! Oh, yes; they'll git my Dickey, no doubt! Why don't they fetch him out, if they dare?"

"Ca'se how thar's durned few who care ter go and tackle him. They say he sits up thar in Sir Noel Farnsworth's room, wi' a pair o' revolvers in his grip, an' several pair more layin' loose around, a watchin' fer them as is goin' ter take him. No one ain't purtiekler about feelin' his pulse, jest yet, I'll allow!"

"Roarin' old ham-bone thet telefoned ter old Joner! thar'll be fun an' funerals, when they try ter take thet young war-colt, you bet! An' I say, ef they try ter lynch him, I hope he'll fill every man's carcass full o' bullet-holes, as tries ter take him!"

"What is the matter, Alva? Why is all this crowd gathered here?"

It was Calamity Jane who spoke, as she approached and tapped the old Annihilator upon the shoulder.

"Why, Janie, gal, they've got Deadwood Dick lodged up thar, in thet hotel, an' he won't come out so thet they can hev ther pleasure o' fittin' his neck wi' one o' Lynch's patent hemp colars!"

"What! Deadwood Dick here?" Calamity gasped, a sudden anxiety in her tone. "I supposed him in Dakota!"

"So did I, Calamity, but et seems both our suppositions ar' incorrect. Great a'riferous ham-bone! ef they ever get Dicky out o' thar, ye'll see sum high old times!"

"I don't want to see it," Calamity replied.

"Sh! Is there no way you and I can rescue him, Avalanche?"

"Great patriarchal ham-bone! I wish thar war, Calamity, an' ye could count on ther Annihilator, every day in a week. But, I fear et's no use o' our interferin', fer thar's thirty ter our one, an' they'd only mob us."

"They shall have a dear time trying to hang him!" the Girl Sport said, her eyes flashing darkly. "I but wish I knew where his camp is, and I'd soon have his men down here to his rescue."

The crowd did not seem to decrease, but grew denser in the street in front of and around the Tontine. A deadly spirit was generally prevalent against the cornered Prince. Men were here who had heard of him, and perhaps been the victims of his early depredations, up in the Black Hills; men were here who had never seen or heard of him, but having sometime been robbed by other agents, were none the less vindictive toward Deadwood Dick; men were here who gloried in taking human life, whether in self-defense, in justice, or cold-handed. And then, the citizens who were law-abiding were there to keep the ball a-rolling.

But none seemed willing to attempt to enter the hotel, and take the famous Prince of the Road, whose hand, with a pistol in it, was a sure guarantee of death. He, together with Sir Noel Farnsworth, was quartered in a room overlooking the street, and it was suspected that the baronet would also fight in the behalf of his guest.

Blacker and denser grew the crowd, and the glitter of knives and revolvers were seen on either hand.

But one glance at the notorious Prince of the Road did these excited, bloodthirsty men want, to settle his accounts.

Murphy, the sheriff, was present, trying to urge on different men to enter the building and take the Road Prince.

But death seemed to have no temptation for them, as not a man moved; and a shout went up, when, at last, Sir Noel Farnsworth stepped out upon the balcony in front of his room. Every voice became hushed, and all was silence among the mob.

After clearing his throat, Sir Noel spoke:

"My friends, I highly appreciate your presence in so august a body, but not knowing how I am indebted for this gathering, will you be kind enough to tell me what you want?"

"Faith, we want that devil's own imp, Deadwood Dick!" replied Sheriff Murphy. "So tumble him out, bedad, or it's niver a bit we'll let up on yez."

"Ay! ay! give us Deadwood Dick! was the shout that went up from the crowd.

A smile came upon the face of Sir Noel.

"That is impossible for me to do, my friends!" he said, pleasantly. "The man, Thoroughbred Tom, called upon me, but as soon as he saw you gathering in the street, he donned another garb and disguise, and made his escape, and—your Deadwood Dick is gone!"

The yell of rage created by this disappointing announcement, was furious, and Sir Noel was obliged to retreat into the hotel, for a shower of sticks, stones and bullets were hurled up at him.

Wild were the mob over the loss of their prize, on whom they had counted so much—especially the ruffian element, to whom the name of Deadwood Dick was a terror. Resolved upon revenge, they made a rush toward the entrance to the Tontine, but the sudden closing of the doors by the manager shut them out.

In the streets they still swarmed, however, and dark threats were made against Sir Noel.

Chief among the leaders of the now riotously disposed gang, was the Leadville giant, Beautiful Bill. Filled to the neck with bad whisky, he was a howling beast, more than a man.

Working their way around to the rear of the restaurant, Calamity Jane and Old Avalanche succeeded in obtaining admittance.

Upon demand, they were shown to the parlor of Sir Noel's suit. The baronet was pacing to and fro, excitedly, while Lady Farnsworth lay upon the sofa, sobbing out her hysterical fears.

Sir Noel looked up in surprise, but bowed courteously, as he saw his new visitors. He had seen both, before, but not to be acquainted with them.

"We come without invitation!" Calamity said. "I wanted to give you a little advice, if you are in the habit of accepting such. My handle is Calamity Jane. This companion of mine is Old Avalanche, the scout. You, I suppose, are Sir Noel Farnsworth?"

"I am. In what way can I serve you?"

"No way, I reckon, as I generally don't de-

pend on no one. But you're in danger, and I came to advise you to slide toward the risin' sun, just as fast as you can crook your ankle."

"You think I am in danger, lady?"

"I do, certain, or I shouldn't have said so. That gang down there, are talking strong of lynching you, for assisting Deadwood Dick to escape."

"I didn't assist him. He didn't even ask me to, but slipped out of his own accord."

"It matters not; you could not change their opinion; and the pot's a-boilin' red hot among 'em. I opine that unless ye git out before sunset, there'll be a lynching, right in front of the Tontine!"

"But I cannot. My sister is a captive in the power of Captain Hawk, the bandit, and I cannot return East, until I regain possession of her."

"Have you heard from Captain Hawk since her capture?"

"No. I have not."

"Well, it will not be safe for you to remain here, unless you've plenty of grit, and intend to face a free scrimmage. In that case, I'll stand by you."

"You?" Sir Noel said, in surprise.

"Ay, I!" Calamity Jane replied, with a smile.

"You may think me a strange character, and perhaps I am, but I enjoy a free fight, when it is for the right; and Avalanche here, will tell you that I never shoot twice at the same object."

"Great ham-bone that war ther final obituary o' old Joner, no!" the Annihilator said.

"Jennie she ar' sum on ther shoot, Cap. Fer instance, when she ken brush an eyewinker off 'm a muskeeter at a thousand yards w'out puttin' on specs, she ain't doin' so bad, ar' she?"

"Well, no, I should say not," Sir Noel replied, with a smile. "Indeed, I thank you both for your kindness. As to myself, I shall not run. I shall stay here, and fight it out!"

"Good! I honor your resolve. You can count Old Avalanche and me on deck with you. As I do not anticipate any trouble, immediately, I will go and secure a fresh stock of condensed death—that is to say, ammunition. But first, and while I think of it, let me warn you of enemies other than those yelling toughs down there in the street."

"I received a similar warning once before, since coming here. I hardly know what to make of it."

"Well, keep your eyes on a certain dark-faced brother of yours. He means you mischief. In conjunction with your other brother, he is plotting against you!"

"My other brother, lady?"

"Yes—have you not another, by the name of Roy Farnsworth?"

"Once I had such a brother!" Sir Noel replied, blushing, "but now he is in Van Dieman's Land, paying the penalty of a rash crime."

"Not so, Sir Noel. Roy Farnsworth is in Leadville, and is plotting against you, in partnership with your brother, Charles. I saw them together, and playing the spy, I learned that you had this brother, and that the two were plotting against you."

"Miss, this is almost incredible. What have I ever done to make them my enemies?" Sir Noel asked, pacing to and fro, in great agitation.

"As near as I can learn, Sir Roy, who here in Leadville goes under the name of Ralph Gardner, cherishes a grudge against you, because you refused to buy him out of going to the penal colonies, and the brothers together, hate you because you are the heir of Sir Roderick's wealth."

"By Heaven, if this is true, they shall find me game, to the bitter end!" Sir Noel cried, angrily. "I am usually free-hearted, and easy to get along with—sluggish they even go so far as to call me; but they shall find that I have some of old Sir Roderick's fiery blood still in my veins."

"Hark!" Calamity Jane suddenly cried, leaping to her feet—"listen to that, will you?"

Sir Noel did listen, and heard a bugle blast pealing along through the valley; then, the wild clatter of many iron-shod feet.

"What does it mean?" he asked, following the Girl Sport to the window. "It sounds like a charge of cavalry!"

"It means that Deadwood Dick has come to show them that he can be either saint or devil!" replied Calamity. "He has come to disperse the mob, and show them that he fears them not!"

They stepped out upon the balcony, to gaze upon a strange scene.

The crowd that had been collected before the Tontine was rapidly scattering in all directions

some cursing, others yelling, and firing. But not faster they flew than came on the road-agents, headed by the straight, handsome, masked figure in black—the unconquerable Deadwood Dick, Prince of the Road!

Like a charging army they came on, their horses at a run, every man masked—two score of them in number, with cocked revolvers in each hand, for they used no hand upon the rein. By the simple pressure of the knee, or the wave of a hand, they guided the flying animals down the main street of Leadville, an occasional yell escaping the lips of Deadwood Dick.

On—they came, and soon there was a signal report from the daring chief's pistol, after which the whole band began an incessant rolling fire upon the flying and panic-stricken mob.

"Kerwhoop! Great ham-bone that discom-bobbered ther terrestyal gravytation uv old Joner's larnyx!" cried Old Avalanche, excitedly—"thet's ther kind o' a hair-pin Deadwood Dick is, every day in a week, an' don't ye fergit it! Ef I warn't so old, I shed give three cheers and a tiger fer him!"

"See! not a man falls under their fire!" Calamity Jane said. "It is a well-arranged plan to scare away the mob. And now, Sir Noel, is a capital chance for you to escape to better quarters, for, even though we might have fought the mob here, it is not a desirable place for you to fight your scheming brothers. It has just occurred to me that I can guide you to the stronghold of this Captain Hawk, if you are willing to trust me."

"But where would I leave Lady Farnsworth, in the meantime?" Sir Noel demanded.

"Leave her here, until your return."

"Perhaps it would be the best plan. Have you any other questions?"

"What have you done with your valuables?"

"I was warned by this Deadwood Dick to deposit them in the hands of old Levi, the Jew!"

"All right. If Dick told you, you may count on it as a safe place, unless an attempt should be made to rob it, which is not unlikely, on the part of your brothers."

"Maybe they are accomplished cracksmen, enough, to crawl into an iron safe for them?" Sir Noel said. "If so, let them try."

A glance down upon the street proved that Deadwood Dick had swept it of the mob, without killing a man, and he dashed on with his men into the dense belt of pine timber on the northern side of the camp or town.

It had been a huge scare, and the wild derisive yells of the road-agents rung back upon the ears of the frightened citizens with maddening effect.

Still, they dared not pursue the handsome, daring Prince, for none were there who cared to face him and his band of invincibles in a fair open fight, which would be the ultimate issue, should they organize a pursuit.

"They've cleaned the mob out!" Calamity said, "and now is our time to puckachee."

The scare of the ride of Deadwood Dick through Leadville, was a theme for excited discussion in the town, among the miners for the rest of the day. Miners gathered upon the streets to distribute their ideas on the matter; the daily paper, on the following morning had an extended notice of the bold act of the road-agents. In closing, it added:

"The so-called English baronet, Sir Noel Farnsworth, laid himself liable to arrest for assisting Deadwood Dick to escape while he was *corroled* in the Tontine, but having made himself scarce, accompanied by the notorious Calamity Jane, and a scout calling himself Old Avalanche, Sheriff Murphy is unable to get a hold of him."

Another notice was posted throughout the town, reading as follows:

"Whereas the people of Leadville, without cause or provocation, turned their hands against me, because of past deeds, I caused the raid to be made into the town, for the purpose of illustrating that Deadwood Dick fears no living man—or men, here below, and so long as he is wanted against those who oppose him shall be meted out a measure full."

Signed,

DEADWOOD DICK.

CHAPTER IX.

THE AZTEC'S STORY—BRAVE LADY FARNSWORTH.

YES, the man was Ralph Gardner, who had come into the stronghold of Captain Harriot Hawk. And by the peremptory order of the bandit chief he was promptly released.

"You did wrong in attempting to come without my orders," the captain said, as he took Gardner to his private room. "The men might have shot you for a spy."

"But I came all the same," Gardner said, "and now I want my prize. Where is she?"

"It matters not just now. You cannot see her, until I see fit to let you. Both she and you are in my power, and it suits me to keep you apart, at present!"

"Why this contrary move?" he demanded. "I paid you well to secure her, and bring her here, did I not?"

"Yes, but honor is not one of the ingredients of my kind, and it may cause you to pay a double sum for your own and her liberty. Or I may take the girl for myself!"

"Curse you!" Gardner cried, in a rage. "You are a traitor to your friends, as well as your foes. But, watch you well—I'll get even with you if you intend to play me this sort of a game."

Lady Belle Farnsworth, after Hawk left her, began making an investigation of the premises, for the bandit had promised her the freedom of his camp, and she meant to enjoy it. So she had not been in the castle four days ere she had learned every crook and cranny thereto, from top to bottom.

Her own room was furnished with a table, stools and a bed all of skins stretched upon rude frames, and this was all, except the doors were so arranged that she could fasten herself in, if she chose.

As soon as she found out concerning Jessie Heath's arrival, the kind-hearted English girl went and made friends with the American, and used her utmost power to cheer Jessie out of her mourning for her lost mother.

A couple of days served to dispel Jessie's grief, to some extent, and the two girls became great friends. Together they roamed through the old castle; through its quaint hallways, and ancient rooms, from bottom to turret, while away their time, and watching for an opportunity to escape.

It was a strange, monotonous sort of life, this of the bandits of Camp Hawk. They had a few amusements, and were as a rule of the most brutal type of ruffians. But they made no offer to molest either Jessie or Lady Belle, doubtless having been warned not to by Hawk.

But though the fair prisoners looked eagerly for some chance to escape, the days rolled by and none came.

They took their meals in Lady Belle's room, and slept there. The food was mainly corn-dodgers and roast meat, but it proved very palatable.

In the course of their rambles, they came across an odd character to whom they took an instant liking.

He was an old Indian, who guarded one of the turrets, where the girls were wont to climb in order to get a view of the surrounding mountain scenery.

At first he was gruff and uncommunicative, but after awhile they succeeded in winning him out of his guard, and getting him to talk.

Finding that they appeared to like him, he became communicative, even going so far as to tell them the history of Castle Hawk.

"It is many years," he said, in tolerable English, "since the Raven came hither. He was then young, and strong and a great brave of the Aztec tribe. He had a squaw, and two puppesses as handsome as the growing maple. But his people, who were a great race in the Far South-west, banished the Raven from the tribe, because he would not sacrifice a beautiful pale-face maiden at the altar, and hunted him away from their land. The Raven was a great warrior, and rallied around him fifty warriors, and came hither. Raven ordered the plateau made, and he was obeyed. He ordered the castle built, and it was done. He ordered the road dug up the mountain-side and that too was done. All this took many years, but the warriors found both time to work and hunt, and were happy. Raven was happy with his squaw and young sons, too, and built great fires on the surrounding peaks.

"When not upon the hunt, his warriors worked in the rock of the mountain, piercing deep into the bowels, to make secret passages.

"At last came the terrible scourge, and one by one Raven's warriors dropped off from a disease that seemed incurable. One by one he laid them away in the depths of the passages their own hands had made, until all, including Raven's squaw and sons were sleeping the sleep of peace at the feet of the Great Manitou. Then Raven alone was spared, and left by himself in his village in the mountain. He never tried to rally another band around him, but became a hermit, until the bandit chief came and robbed the Raven of his peaceful home, and turned it into a robbers' stronghold. Raven's life was spared, but he was placed here in the turret of

his own wigwam, to watch until the Great Manitou shall call him."

"Then you bear the bandit chief no love?" Lady Belle questioned, eagerly.

"The Raven hates the bandit more than the cougar hates the trapper. But his hands are old, and his body lame, and he cannot fight."

"Poor Raven! Would you not like to leave the castle, and go to the villages of the pale-face, where you could get work, and have a better home, than here?"

"The Raven would like to go, but he has no where to go—no home—no friends."

"Let him not fear. If he will escape from the castle, and take us with him, we will guide him to the pale-face city, and give him money to buy a cabin, weapons and ammunition. Will you go?"

"The Raven will think. He knows of many secret ways out of the castle, and he mēbbe take pale-face girls, and go. He think much hard about it, and if he go, he come for pale-face girls an' take 'em along."

So the girls went back to their room, refreshed with a stronger hope of escape.

This was the third day of Jessie's stay in the castle, and the fourth of Lady Belle's.

That evening as they were sitting alone in their room, after lamp-light, the door was suddenly thrown open, and a man stepped quickly into the room and closed it after him.

Jessie uttered a little cry of alarm, for she recognized the well-known form and evil face of Ralph Gardner.

"Sh!" he said, in a low tone; "keep still, or you will attract attention. If I were caught here it would be my death."

"Then why are you here?" Jessie demanded, coldly.

"To rescue you young ladies from the power of this wretch, Hawk. I have been days in working to reach you!" Gardner said. "I have at last triumphed, and can effect your escape."

"How kind you are, Ralph Gardner. But, do you think that you can deceive me? No, indeed! You are a hypocrite—a base schemer—a murderer. Were I to stay here until doomsday, I would never accept rescue at your hands."

"Why, my dear Miss Heath, I am surprised. You speak in riddles."

"Then, I will speak even plainer!" Jessie replied, scornfully. "I will say even more, if your comprehension is so poor. I can see through your whole scheme, as though I were reading it from a book. It was you, who hired Captain Hawk to murder my poor mother, and bring me here. Now you have come, pretending that you have gained an unobserved entrance, and you propose that if I will marry you, you will take me away from here. Otherwise, you will leave me here, in the power of Captain Hawk. Do so. I would rather live here until I died, than to leave here with you!"

A demoniac scowl came upon Ralph Gardner's face.

"Curse you," he said, savagely, "you are pretty shrewd at guessing, for you hit the case, exactly. I hired Hawk to bring you here, and now you have your choice between marrying me and leaving here, or marrying him, and staying. Which will you do?"

"I will do neither!" Jessie replied, firmly. "I defy you and your power. Do your worst, for I would take my own life, rather than to marry you."

"We shall see. I will leave you here to the tender mercies of Captain Hawk, and not return for a month. By the end of that time I believe you will be ready to accept me."

And with a bow, and a devilish smile, Ralph Gardner left the room.

Captain Hawk, in the meantime was riding alone, toward Leadville, at full tilt, upon his handsome horse. A fine equestrian was this bandit chief, but merciless upon a horse, for he used the spur and whip savagely.

On arrival at the outskirts of Leadville's bustling city, he drew reins and dismounting, secured his horse in a grove of chaparral, to a stout sapling.

He then removed the mask from his face, and walked boldly into the town. Few if any had ever seen him without his mask, and he had no fear of being recognized.

Making his way to the Tontine restaurant and hotel, he ordered a waiter to show him to the rooms of the Farnsworths, and, was consequently shown into the parlor of their suite.

My Lady Farnsworth was sitting by the window, but arose haughtily, as she beheld a stranger standing boldly in her presence.

"I beg your pardon, my lady!"

said, bowing low, "but I could not resist the temptation of calling upon you, believing that you would know me, but it would seem that you do not."

"No, sir, I do not know you. How should I, when you are a total stranger to me, and in a strange place?" her ladyship replied.

"I was not always strange to you, Barbara. There was once a time when Byron Stansol was a dear friend to you—a friend that was a lover, but you refused him for a title."

"Byron Stansol?" Lady Farnsworth echoed—"you, Byron Stansol?"

"The same, dear Barbara, although I have never carried sail under that name, since I left England. Here in America, I am known as Captain Harriot Hawk, the bandit!"

"Merciful heaven, you are not that monster?"

"The same, if a monster you choose to call me. I am known as Harriot Hawk, here, and as a bad man. I have your daughter in my possession, and I have come to make terms with you for her restoration."

"What terms do you demand, sir?"

"I have not really decided. One hundred thousand pounds might possibly do for the present."

"Are you mad, Byron Stansol? I have not so much money in the world. Nor would I give it to you, if I had."

"So? Well, I am not a hard man to please, and we can talk up another plan. For instance, you marry me and take me back to England as some great lord you have met during your travels. Your title and social position will enable you to do this. I have plenty of filthy lucre, and we can cut a great swell in London, and I flatter myself, my title and shrewdness will get me into the Queen's favor, after which I am all hunki-dori!"

"Stop!" Lady Farnsworth said, deprecatingly. "I would not marry you were you a king!"

"Not even to save the life of your daughter, Barbara?"

"No, not even to do that. I shall never marry again!"

"Probably not, unless you marry me, for I shall kill you, if you refuse."

"Monster!"

"Ay, call me all the pet names you like, for I deserve them all!" Captain Hawk said, with a grin. "I am a demon when you arouse me. I have no fear of God or man. My hand has been stained with blood many times, and I am not afraid to stain it again."

"Nor am I afraid of you!" Lady Farnsworth replied bravely, and making a sudden move she drew a cocked revolver from her skirt's folds, and leveled it at the bandit's heart.

So sudden and rapidly did she act, that Hawk had no time to draw his own weapons ere he was covered.

"Now dare to make a single hostile move, and I will shoot you!" Lady Farnsworth said.

"Furies seize you!" he gasped, hoarsely, wincing under the aim of the revolver. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that if you move an inch, I will put every one of the seven bullets in this revolver into your body!" Lady Barbara replied, triumphantly. "You are my prisoner, Captain Hawk, and I shall see that you are dealt with, as men of your type deserve."

"Pshaw, you would not shoot me, Barbara!" the bandit said, trying to force a smile. "You are only trying to intimidate me by playing a practical joke."

"Try me!" Lady Farnsworth replied, a steely glitter in her eyes. "I have every confidence that it will prove a serious joke to you."

"Curse you! curse you! What do you intend to do?" Hawk demanded, his face growing white and flushed by turns. "You are not going to give me up?"

"That is precisely what I am going to do," the heroic woman replied, keeping a revolver still upon a level with his heart, and touching a call-bell with her other hand. "You are a prize I do not value, and I shall make a present of you to the public!"

"But, stop! listen to reason!" Hawk cried, growing nervous. "If you give me up, and I do not return to the stronghold, my men will cut your daughter's head off. Those were my orders when I left camp!"

"A clever lie, Byron Stansol, but it will avail you nothing. You would not give such an order, as you value your prize too much, and you knew not what delay might detain you. You are too shrewd a schemer for that!"

A horrible oath escaped the ruffian's lips, when he saw that he was foiled at every turn. He was tempted to reach for his own weapons, but he dared not leave the daring woman on the spot, but

he was fearful that she would kill him ere he could accomplish his purpose.

A servant soon appeared, in answer to Lady Farnsworth's call.

"Send the proprietor at once," her ladyship said, calmly, "and also the sheriff and one or two stout men. This is the notorious bandit and ruffian, Captain Hawk."

The servant hastened to obey, and in five minutes the room was full of men who were willing to take charge of the outlaw, and the news had spread all over the town of how Lady Farnsworth had captured the dread chief, of whom nearly every one was afraid.

Sheriff Jo Murphy secured Captain Hawk, and bound him beyond a possibility of his ever escaping without aid, and he was marched off to the jail, followed by a crowd.

The news spread like wild-fire, and it was soon in the mouth of every man, woman and child.

An instant trial was ordered by the people, and though the sheriff should have waited the slow motion of the law, by rights, he could not resist without running the risk of having his own life taken by the mob.

And, then, too, it was not known how many pals might have accompanied the bandit chief to the town, and it was feared that if there had been any such, they would spread the news to the main band who would make an effort to regain their chief.

Accordingly a jury was selected, and the case was brought up, with a prominent lawyer as prosecutor.

Captain Hawk was present, and had to be gagged to prevent his frightful profanity and abuse. A young pettifogger undertook the defense, but after he had spoken a few words, the crowd grew so excited, and revolvers were displayed in such profusion, that he wisely took a seat.

A verdict of "guilty," soon followed—the jury not leaving their seats.

"Then," said the judge of the improvised court, "I sentence the said Captain Hawk to death, by hanging to the limb of a convenient tree, until he is dead. The execution to take place to-morrow morning at sunrise. Off with him, to jail, and let a strong guard be placed over him."

Away to the jail was the bandit again taken, and a guard of half a hundred armed men placed around the jail to guard against his being rescued by any of his confederates in crime.

In the morning he was to die!

CHAPTER X.

LYNCHED—DEADWOOD DICK AGAIN—OUT OF THE CASTLE.

FROM the moment Captain Hawk was recommitted to jail, crowds began to gather in anticipation of the coming lynching in the morning. Men came in from the mines—from Malta—from Adelaide city, and from all the local mining points, for the execution of a real live road-agent was quite a treat, in its way, to these rough toilers after wealth.

They gathered in little knots about the street corners, to discuss the exciting topic, or in saloons to gamble away the time.

At last the morning came, and the street for many rods from the jail was black with a surging mass of humanity, even at the first streak of day. And there they watched and waited with feverish impatience, for the moment of the execution to arrive.

At last the sun shoved his rim up over the eastern horizon, and promptly on time, Captain Hawk was led from the jail by the sheriff and his aids, and positioned beneath the strong out-reaching branch of an adjacent tree.

Then the rope was drawn over a limb, and attached to his neck, and 'mid wild cries he was launched into eternity.

Ralph Gardner returned to Leadville, the evening after the execution of Captain Hawk in the morning, and sought out Chandos, who had changed his quarters to another hotel.

"We have work to do to-night," he said, throwing himself into a seat. "I have just learned that Sir Noel has deposited all his wealth in the keeping of an old Jew pawnbroker, down here, and it must be our duty to steal that money, and light out."

"Why light out?" the Englisher demanded, coolly puffing away at a cigar.

"Because, the place will soon be too warm to hold me, unless I turn road-agent. Read this!"

And he handed Chandos a sheet of note paper, upon which was written the following, in a bold style of chirography:

"MR. RALPH GARDNER: Your day as owner of the Specter mine is now to close. After playing specter to my satisfaction, I have concluded to come back to life, and haunt you in another way—I shall drop you at sight."

"MORRIS HEATH!"

"Well?" Chandos queried; "what about this?"

"It means that it will be healthiest for me to puckachee! This man Heath was supposed to have been murdered some months ago, but it seems by this note that he is still alive. I do not care to meet him, for he carries a deadly rancor in his bosom for those whom he hates."

"How did you learn about the jewels?" Chandos demanded.

"I heard Sir Noel say that they were deposited there. In company with the old scout, Avalanche, he is quartered in an old cabin, down in California gulch."

"Why 'don't you send the mob after him?" Chandos asked, savagely.

"I will, I will. They will fix him in fine shape. There's the big bullwhacker, Beautiful Bill, who will take delight in routing him out. But, for the present, we've other work to do. Have you any disguises with you?"

"No!"

"Then, wait here, and I will get a couple of wigs and beards."

And so Sir Roy, or Ralph Gardner, took his departure, soon to return, however, with the required articles of disguise.

After careful preparation, their disguises were effectually donned, and they were ready for the work ahead.

"Where does this pawnbroker hold out?" Chandos growled. "Like as not we shall get ourselves in a trap, for our pains."

"Never fear. The old Jew is fast asleep ere this, and if he awakes I'll smother him. He keeps a shanty around here on Harrison avenue, and there's an easy mode of entrance on the back side, and the sooner we get through with the job, the better, for I want to get out. I mean death for me to remain here, with Morris Heath alive, unless I can get first pop, which is not likely."

Leaving the hotel, they set out at once toward their destination. Crossing from Chestnut street to Harrison avenue through State street, they hurried along with the crowd that was still abroad, despite the lateness of the hour.

Entering an alleyway they traversed it until it brought them to the rear of a low slab building, and here they halted.

"This is the place!" Gardner said, in a low tone. "I think we can work here, unmolested. The first act is to open that door, and gain an entrance. Luckily I have a number of keys, some of which may suit the circumstances."

With the rapidity and caution of an old and accomplished cracksmen, he began to try the keys, but none would fit. He next took a wire from his pocket, and bent it, and tried that, several times. In the third trial he was successful, and the bolt was turned in its trough.

Cautiously opening the door, the two brothers entered, and softly closed the door after them.

They were in Stygian darkness, now, but Gardner had provided for this contingency by bringing with him a dark-lantern, and they soon had some light on the subject.

Removing their boots in the linter-room they had entered, they then stole softly into the front apartment, which was used as store-room and store for the sale of lager beer, groceries, notions, and jewelry; also as a pawnbroker's shop, where money could be obtained on articles of value.

The stentorian snores from behind a counter announced that the Jew was already enjoying sweet repose, after the fatigue of a day's labor in his "leedle sidhore."

"That's one point gained," Gardner whispered. "You hold the lantern, and I will try to bind and gag him. If I am successful at that, our prize is within our grasp."

Chandos took the lantern, and securing some stout straps, Ralph Gardner climbed in behind the counter, where the corpulent form of Levi, the Jew, was stretched out upon a cot-bed.

Working with great care, the mine-owner slipped the rope beneath the Jew's wrists, and soon had a successful tie, then followed his feet, and next Gardner threw a heavy blanket over his head, to prevent his cries.

"Now, we are all hunki-dori!" he said. "We can work without molestation. Yonder safe, probably, contains what we want."

"Yes—hurry up and get the accursed stuff, for I am getting as nervous as a cat!" Chandos whined. "If we were to be caught here, we'd

be strung up like that bandit was, this morning!"

"I'll take the chances!" Gardner replied. "Here, hold light down here while I cipher out the combination of this lock."

It was a harder job than the mine-owner had expected, but he was equal to the task, and at last the door swung open.

Inside the safe were a large number of compartments and drawers, all of which were locked.

But to pry these open was the work of only a few minutes, and the contents lay revealed to the two burglars.

There were wallets, and caskets, and portmonnaies, and watches, chains, and gold and silver ornaments, in great profusion, and the hands of Ralph Gardner hauled them ruthlessly from their receptacles, while a triumphant laugh escaped his lips.

"This is a fat pan. We've struck it rich, sure pop!" he said. "Here, let's first count the cash, and divide the spoils."

Not only was the pocket-book of Sir Noel copulent with money, but each of the others were full of bills and dust, and when the money had all been counted and the dust estimated, there was at least twelve thousand dollars' worth of spoils in the two burglars' possession. This in addition to the diamonds, watches and other jewelry.

"We will divide the money, and keep the jewel, until we can dispose of them!" Gardner said, counting it out into two different piles. "And now, let's get out of this before we are discovered."

Pocketing their spoils, they stole from the rear entrance, like the thieves they were, into the night wherein to hide their guilt.

Not far did they go, however, before they were suddenly and peremptorily halted. Before them and behind them the alley was filled with armed masked men. Confronting them was the unmistakable form of Deadwood Dick!

"Hold!" he said, sternly. "Your trouble has availed you nothing! Not a word, unless you are anxious that death should suddenly overtake you!"

"What do you mean by this foolery?" cried Gardner. "Let us pass."

"Deliver up the spoils of your theft!" Deadwood Dick replied, coolly. "Get ready, boys. I give this pair of precious rascals five minutes, by the watch, to unload. If they do not begin before I wave my hand, plug them."

Gardner and his brother at once began to disgorge their spoils into the hats of several of the men who stood ready as receivers.

"Curse you, Deadwood Dick, I will get even with you, for this, if I have to wade through blood to do it!" Gardner raved. "You shall get little mercy, once I get you in my power, I assure you."

"I'll take your word for it. There; have you disgorged all that you stole?"

"Yes, curse you."

"Very well. Boys, you may search them, and bind and gag them, and leave them here in the alley. Be lively, now, for we have no time to tarry."

The order was obeyed with alacrity, and the brother-villains soon were lying upon their backs in the alleyway, stripped of their disguises; while with the spoils in his possession, Deadwood Dick was soon riding mountainward, accompanied by his band.

To a cabin in California Gulch he rode, while his band galloped on toward their retreat.

After the departure of Ralph Gardner, Lady Belle and Jessie were more at ease, for they feared the villain, even though they tried to be brave in his presence.

Fortunately Lady Belle was spared the pain and humiliation of knowing that Gardner was her own brother, and still clung to the supposition that he was in Van Dieman's Land, serving out his time.

The next day they again visited the Raven in the turret.

The Indian welcomed them with a grim "ugh!" and after a few questions on the part of Lady Belle, he said:

"Raven escape to-night; take pale-face girls into earth, and out through secret passage. Go to Leadville, and leave the tower town of the Aztec forever."

"Oh! you dear good Indian!" Lady Belle cried, involuntarily throwing her arms around his neck, and kissing his swarthy cheek. "If you will only do this, you shall be well rewarded for it, and you shall have a nice home. I will even persuade Sir Noel to take you back to England with us!"

"The Raven would not leave the land of the setting sun," the Indian replied. "He stay near the ashes of his people, and when he die, mingle his dust with their dust. Let the pale-face maidens go now; the Raven will come soon after the birth of the new day."

So Jessie and Lady Belle went back to their room rejoicing with the prospect of their early escape.

The day passed slowly, however, and the only way of whiling away their time was sitting at the window and watching the men moving about upon the plateau, for they had been through the castle so many times that there was no novelty in it any more.

There were new recruits coming into camp, every few hours—evil-looking ruffians, whom one would have feared to meet of a dark night.

Upon the plateau they formed themselves, and Lieutenant Marmosa drilled them in the tactics of the manual of arms.

Night at last came, however, and with it great excitement to Castle Hawk. A courier arrived, heralding the death of Captain Hawk, at Leadville.

The news of course created a great commotion in camp, and there were immediate preparations made for a night ride, by the orders of the lieutenant. The men were ready—even eager to go. Before starting, however, the whole band were assembled on the plateau, and mounting a barrel, Lieutenant Marmosa looked them all over with an approving glance.

"Comrades," he said, "you are about to take the road to avenge the death of your captain, Harriot Hawk. You will meet with strong resistance, and your success depends all on how you fight, and who leads you. Choose some man from the band, whom you would have fill the boots of Captain Hawk, and we will at once start upon the road!"

There was a moment's silence among the men, during which time each man turned to look in his neighbor's face.

Then in a voice that was unanimous, they shouted the name:

"Marmosa!"

The lieutenant bowed, grimly.

"As you like, my fellows. I would as soon lead you as not, and hope to do so satisfactorily!" he said. "To the saddle, now, and we will sweep down upon Leadville like a blight!"

The ruffians obeyed by mounting with alacrity, and soon the whole band rode off of the plateau, and down the terrible mountain trail that led to the darkening depths of the solitudes in the strange vales and gulches, below.

"Now we are better able to escape than ever," Lady Belle exclaimed, triumphantly. "There cannot be many of the outlaws, and I believe we could take and hold the fort, ourselves."

"I fear we would not make very brave soldiers," Jessie replied, with a faint smile.

It was near midnight ere a soft rap came upon the door to their room, and a moment later the Raven entered.

He was armed with a rifle and knife, and a skin mantle was drawn about his shoulders.

"Ugh! Pale-face girls git ready, now, and come with Raven. He take 'em out to the gulch at the foot of the mountain, and go with them to the city of the pale-face."

Lady Belle and Jessie hastened to don their wrappings, and then the chief led the way out into the castle.

"Is there no danger of the guards?" Lady Belle asked, glancing nervously around.

Raven, the Aztec, smiled.

"Guards gone to sleep—all except what guard the dugway," he said, tapping his knife significantly. "Pale-face girl no need to fear."

From the room they entered a large hall, and traversed it for a considerable distance.

Then they passed into a sort of niche, and touching a concealed spring the Aztec pushed open an apparently solid wall of rock; it moved to one side, revealing a large, black, cavernous space beyond.

Bidding the girls keep close at his heels, the chief entered the dense gloom, and soon they began to descend a rude stone staircase, which had some time been chiseled out of the solid rock.

Down, down, down they descended, step by step, without stopping, until it seemed that several hours had been spent in the toilsome walk.

Then Raven paused, and the girls heard him roll aside a huge rock.

A moment later they stepped upon the grassy bottom of a gulch far down in between towering mountains, where the moonlight shone full upon them.

"Now, pale-face girls free!" the Aztec an-

nounced. "Have to walk many miles before reach town."

"I do not think we shall mind the walk, as we are walking for liberty," Lady Belle responded.

"Let us start at once," was Jessie's answer, and they sallied forth, on their weary night tramp.

CHAPTER XI.

A SPANIARD'S VENGEANCE!—DEADWOOD DICK'S "STRANGE RESOLVE."

AFTER the departure of Deadwood Dick, Ralph Gardner and his brother lay in the alley-way, bound and gagged and unable to move.

It was food more bitter than gall, for the former, to know that he had been beaten at his own game, to say nothing to the humiliation of being left in such a plight.

The night wore on, and the noise and bustle of the town died out. The infant city was wrapped in slumber. Still the two burglars were forced to lay upon their backs in the dark alley-way, with no sign of rescue until discovered by some chance passer-by.

At last, however, the sharp ear of Gardner detected footsteps coming up the street, but when they turned into the alley, he knew not whether to be fearful or to rejoice. Nearer and nearer came the footsteps, then a man bent over the imprisoned mine-owner, and peered down into his face.

It was the gambler, Carlos Cordova! To see that the man before him was Gardner caused the Spaniard to start.

"At last I have got you!" he exclaimed, with a low, devilish laugh, in which all the Spanish of his nature seemed to burst forth. "I have found you just where I want you. Cut my head off, would you, because you beat me at cards by cheating, eh? We'll see you do it, at once—oh! yes, at once. Did you not receive my note—from the specter of the mine? I penned that, as well as played the specter. Morris Heath is dead—I saw you when you murdered him. I was in the shaft-house at the time, watching you. Hal! hal! I could hang you higher than Gilroy's kite, but I have a better vengeance in view—vengeance! do you hear? For all you have stolen from me I am going to cut your head off, as you were going to mine, a few nights since. Ha! ha! that will appease my appetite for revenge upon you!"

Gardner groaned. He could not do more, with the gag fastened so tightly in his mouth. Cordova saw it, and laughed more villainously than before.

"Groan, groan," he cried, demoniacally. "It is sweet music in my ears to hear you. But hark! footsteps come this way. I must not be thwarted of my vengeance. I'll take care that I'm not, too. Say your prayers, for you are doomed!"

He drew a heavy, thin-bladed knife from his pocket, and with a sweep of it across the throat of Ralph Gardner, he severed the head from the body!

Then, wheeling, he plunged the reeking blade to the hilt in Chandos's heart, after which he turned and fled from the alley, out into the night.

Down in one of the blackest portions of Strayhorse Gulch, two score of horsemen, attired in black suits and masks, were drawn up in line, as silent as specters of the night; silent until there came the sound of ringing hoof-strokes, and a horseman dashed up. Then the voice of Deadwood Dick:

"Come on! come on! The bandits are coming down the gulch. We'll make the cliffs, and with our repeating rifles, cut these human hyenas to pieces!"

On dashed the Prince of the Road and his men. On—on—until they were upon an eminence commanding the gulch below.

Here they waited.

Soon the clatter of many hoofs was heard, and the bandits were in sight in the gulch below.

Though very strong was this ruffian gang of cutthroats, with Deadwood Dick to lead the assault there was no hesitation. A terrible round of fire from the inexhaustible Henry rifles of the road-agents poured down into the ranks of the bandits.

Surprised at this unexpected onset, the bandits made but a feeble response;—then they spurred their animals in all directions to escape the scouring fire.

A detachment of Deadwood Dick's men gave chase, but were not successful in capturing a single bandit.

Of those who had been killed there were full

a dozen, and as many horses, but not for these cared the Prince of the Road, and after ascertaining that none of his own men or horses were injured, he dispatched them back to their camp.

Later Deadwood Dick was at his village, but he staid not long there, but rode away, after bidding his men all good-by. He acted strangely, but they could not account for it, and watched him depart with feelings of anxiety.

From his village, he went to the cabin, on the outskirts of Leadville, where he expected to find Calamity Jane, Avalanche and Sir Noel Farnsworth, but he only found the former two. Sir Noel, in disguise, had gone to Leadville to make arrangements for the burial of his two brothers, of whose deaths he had been apprised by an explanatory letter from their murderer, Carlos Cordova.

Calamity welcomed the Prince of the Road with a cordial handshake, and the Annihilator was profuse in his greetings.

"Great pestiferous ham-bone!" he ejaculated, "I'm as glad ter see ye, Dicky, as tho' ye war a part o' ther great destructive Annihilation; shute me fer a coyote ef I ain't! Hain't seen anything o' my mare, Prudence, or my goat, Florence Night-in-a-gale, I suppose? Left the latter up at Del Norte, when you an' I war thar, Dicky, an' the goat he desarted me up in Dakoty, ter run a great destructive caravan o' demolishun hisself, I expect."

"No, Alva, I haven't been fortunate enough to run across your animals," Deadwood Dick replied. "Indeed, it gave me surprise when I heard that you and Calamity were down here."

"Yes, we had to come down, so that if there were any notable skewrups, we could take a hand," Calamity said, with a quiet laugh. "I like it here, and believe I shall stay here for awhile."

"Possibly I may follow your example, when I pay off the debt against me!" and Deadwood Dick spoke bitterly.

"How do you mean, Mr. Harris?"

"You shall soon learn," Dick replied. "I am going straight to Leadville, and give myself up to the justice-grabbers, and let them hang me and have done with it. They will never get over their antipathy for me, until they see me dangling in mid-air beneath a tree-limb. After that, I am not afraid of them, for they cannot hang a man but once, and that satisfies the law for all previous misdemeanors. I have but to hang, and then I can laugh at them all, for I shall be a free man—free to go where, or do whatsoever I choose."

Deadwood Dick spoke earnestly, and they could not doubt that he intended to do otherwise than as he said.

"You are foolish," Calamity said, advisingly. "What do you expect to make by losing your life, to satisfy a crazy people? Bet your boots I wouldn't do it, not by a long chalk. Would you, Alva?"

"Great mother-in-law ter ther antediluvian devil, no. I reckon I wouldn't stretch my wind-pipe, jest because some one wanted me to."

"But I think you don't comprehend the advantage I am going to derive," the Prince of the Road said, grimly. "I am not going to die, as pilgrims usually do, but I am going to live through the ordeal. I am going to live through the ordeal, and afterward laugh in the faces of those who witnessed my send-off."

"Live through being hung!" Calamity ejaculated. "Impossible!"

"No, not impossible. It has been done. After I am cut down, I want you to take charge of my body, and apply remedies for my resuscitation. If you succeed, all right. If you fail, all right. Death would have grappled me sooner or later. It is but a venture, at the best, and I am going to try it."

"You will fail!" Calamity said anxiously. "The men who serve Judge Lynch do not make knot-tyers for fun."

"I care not for that fact. I shall run the risk. All that I want you to promise is that you will try to resuscitate me."

"Which I promise, of course. But I think you are rashly running a terrible risk. Supposing you weather the gale, and free yourself! How long will you remain so? Not three months will pass, I'll guarantee, ere you will be again at the head of the band of men, scouring through the country. Some one will call you a road-agent, and your head will be covered just as thick with rewards, then, as now. It is not your nature to be still, and therefore, you cannot long remain a free man. Half-man and half-devil, it is your destiny to live and die upon the road!"

"Then I will die in my coming venture, if I do not live!" Deadwood Dick replied.

"Great ham-bone! Ef I hed sech a grudge ag'in' myself like you, Dicky, I'd go and drown myself, I would, sw'ar if I wouldn't. Yer grit reminds me, sum'a't o' that o' old Huldah Pen-erol, up in Dakota. She war a tremendous ugly-lookin' woman, an' every time she looked in a look-g-glass, she'd git madder 'an a hornet at herself an' punch ther stuffin' out o' ther lookin'-glass. One day she resolved ter commit susanside, and hired a feller ter tie her heels ter ther tail o' a bufler, and Lordy! ye orter see'd her snagged along. Et war beauchiful, an' I an' my old goat Florence Night-in-a-gale nigh about bu'sted our sides a-laffin'. That war the last ever see'd o' Huldah."

"I haven't got any particular grudge against myself," Deadwood Dick replied. "I have made my mind up to do it, and no sort of argument will change my decision. You will act as I have directed, Calamity?"

"To the letter, Dick," the Girl Sport replied, in a choked voice. "You are not going?"

"Yes, Jennie, for I have other matters to attend to. Good-by, my friend," and Deadwood Dick clasped her hand warmly in his. "I hope when I look upon your face again, it will be as a free man."

Then, after shaking hands all around, the Prince of the Road took his departure, riding rapidly toward Leadville.

As he was passing through a ravine near the town, four men stepped from the chaparral, and raised their hats to him, in salutation.

"All right," he said, without drawing rein. "Be ready at sunset, and act according to my directions. I guess the matter can be managed all right."

Then, he galloped on.

CHAPTER XII. EXIT DEADWOOD DICK!

A CROWD of people in the main street of Leadville—men, women, and children, the sun rising over the eastern chain of snow-capped mountains; a man, bareheaded, standing upon a box in the midst of the crowd, and that man, Deadwood Dick!

Such was the scene.

"My hearers," the Prince of the Road said, coolly, "you behold before you, the notorious road-agent, Deadwood Dick, come to deliver himself up to justice. I ask your attention but a moment, and then you shall have the pleasure of witnessing my skill as a tight-rope performer."

"My career has been one strangely eventful, and in bringing it to a close, I wish to thank my Maker for his many mercies to me, and also you, my pilgrims, for the contributions you may have tendered me, generally speaking. Indeed, you have panned out handsomely. Some of you may say that my life as a road-agent has been highly criminal. I don't agree with you on that score, for where I have tapped you, I have done so in a gentlemanly manner, and have, as a rule, circulated the spoils among poor and needy families. At any rate, I have not a cent in the world, now, that was not honestly earned."

"I have aided a few ruffianly characters in getting a grand send-off, to be sure, but they were the worst of human brutes, and feared neither God nor man, and whose lives were a curse to the country, and a discredit to the name of man. I only wish I could drop a few more of them, but have concluded to let out that job to some one else."

"Therefore, in balancing my accounts, I have not much to regret. But the law has seen fit to regard me as a ferocious criminal, and not wishing to offend the law—the great, majestic law—I do deliver myself up to be lynched from the nearest limb of the nearest tree. I see below me, here, in the crowd, four officials of the law, from Deadwood, and as I know they are anxious to assist me off, I will surrender myself to them!"

"And we claim you, in the name of the law!" came the cry, and the four bewhiskered individuals Deadwood Dick had indicated, sprung upon the box, and took possession of him, while the crowd yelled and cheered lustily.

No ceremony was there used, in giving the Prince of the Road the send-off he had desired, by these four men from Deadwood.

He was borne between them beneath an adjacent tree, and a rope was fixed around his neck by one of the men. Then, at a signal from him, the other three threw the other end of the rope over the limb of the tree, and they all seized it, ready to launch the cool road-agent into eternity.

"Have you any word to leave or any prayers to make?" asked the rope-adjuster, grimly.

"No prayers to make, as I made them before

I gave myself up," Deadwood Dick said, coolly. "If, however, you will deliver my body, after death to my friends, Calamity Jane and Old Avalanche, they will have me taken care of, as I have given them proper instructions. That's all—pull ahead!"

And they did pull, and the body of the famous road-agent was suspended in mid-air.

He gave a few struggles, and then was quiet. In five minutes he was lowered to the ground, and after a short examination, the executioner turned to the crowd:

"Deadwood Dick is dead!" he said. "He has paid the penalty of the law, and you can ask no more. His body belongs to Calamity Jane. Until she comes forward to claim it, I hold it. Please to disperse, and go your ways, and let the dead lie in peace!"

The words had the effect to disperse the crowd, when a wagon drove up, containing Calamity Jane and a rough coffin box. Into this the body of Deadwood Dick was placed, and then the wagon was driven rapidly away.

A few more words; then we close the book of this veracious chronicle.

The two erring brothers of Sir Noel Farnsworth were buried in the Leadville cemetery, as also was the mother of Jessie Heath; then Sir Noel and his party returned to Denver, from whence they started on their return to England, accompanied by Jessie, who went as Lady Belle's companion, but it is not unlikely that she will some day not far off become the dearer companion of Sir Noel for life.

In Leadville, Raven the Aztec, Calamity Jane and Old Avalanche may still be found, while the many admirers of Deadwood Dick we shall have to refer to a new novel soon to appear, entitled:

Deadwood Dick's Device;

OR,

THE SIGN of the DOUBLE CROSS.

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